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# SOUTHERN SILHOUETTES

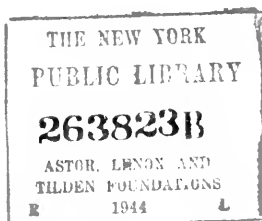
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JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH



NEW YORK  
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## INTRODUCTORY.

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Perhaps as the old order of things in the South is rapidly passing into the realms of legend and tradition, the time has come when one who was part and parcel of that old order can appropriately put on record the story of a day that is dead.

The sketches here compiled in book form after running their course in the *New York Evening Post*, are not the work of imagination, but are accurate outlines of actual entities, written with the loving desire to do away with some of the misconceptions that have militated against a true appreciation of what is noblest and best in the people of whom they treat.

To those who demand plot and catastrophe for mental aliment this book is offered with an apology. To those who are avid of the truth, whatever guise it assumes, it is offered with confidence.

If it serves but to shed the illumination of a taper upon one obscured spot; if it but rescues the memory of one beautiful life from unmerited oblivion, it will not have been written in vain.

THE AUTHOR.

Schwartz 20 Dec. 1943



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# SOUTHERN SILHOUETTES.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE COLONEL.

HE was a sort of potentate in his way before the war. He has been a sort of oracle in his way since. Not that either eminence was of his own seeking, nor that he ever shows any offensive consciousness of his own exaltation above neighboring and younger planters. His position has been the gradual outcome of circumstances, and he accepts it as he does his gray hairs and his rheumatic leg, simply as something that the years have brought him unsolicited.

His grandfather "opened up" the first plantation in the county, the very same that he still cultivates, and the family name is perpetuated in Sims's Bayou, Sims's Landing, Sims's Lake, and Sims's Ferry. It is a comfortable reflection to the Colonel that the name will not be buried with him when they lay him away in one of the brick-oven affairs that have from time to time been erected in that corner of the flower-garden known as the family burying-ground, where several generations of Simses sleep peacefully under the jessamine and japonica bushes. He has never quite gotten used to regarding himself as the last of the Simses,

for there had been Fred and Albert, who, in the course of nature, should have taken his place at the helm when death relieved him from duty; but one of his boys fell at Manassas and the other at Shiloh, and the Colonel has not even the satisfaction of knowing that they are lying out there in the garden under the star jessamines, waiting for him. Not that he wastes much time in fruitless retrospection. He is too well-balanced for that, and was never one of those unwise mortals who petulantly refuse to accept the compensations time invariably offers us as a salve for our many sores and bruises.

The Colonel came straight to the plantation from the classic atmosphere of Harvard. He was graduated there with high honors in the class of '35. During the time of his college life, if any soaring ambitions or lofty intentions intruded themselves into the plan of his future, he wisely laid them all aside with his Greek and Latin grammars when he settled into the groove to which he had been predestined from birth. If it ever occurred to him that a classic collegiate course was incongruous with the practical duties awaiting him, no one was made the recipient of the reflection, and he ran his course as industriously as if a professorship was the ultimate destiny awaiting him. The practical duties that faced him, when he passed from heirship into actual possession of the "old Sims place" were responsible but not onerous, and, looking back, he believed he could fairly claim to have performed them to the best of his ability. He had always made humanity and a sense of justice prime essentials in his selection of an overseer, and, paying

liberal salaries, secured the very best. Having installed an efficient prime minister at the head of affairs, his sense of personal responsibility was reduced to a minimum. If the Colonel had been light-minded, he might have given his young manhood up to those allurements that appeal so strongly to the rich and leisurely class. But he never had been light-minded, and quietly shelving his literary and classic proclivities, he applied himself industriously to the task of making his plantation the "brag place" of the county.

He promptly recognized two absolute needs in the furtherance of this object—a good wife and a better gin-house. A bachelor establishment on the plantation would just fall short of the disreputable, and the old horse-power gin of his father's reign must give place to a steam gin. The selection of a wife and the building of a new gin were occupations enough for any one year in an average man's life. The Colonel accomplished both to his own entire satisfaction and the envy of his neighbors. It was a matter of pride with him that the smoke-stack of his gin should be at least two feet higher than any other gin stack in the county. He revised, and supervised, and pondered the architectural plans for the structure with absorbing interest, taking care to locate it so that whether he was lolling in the big Spanish-leather chair that formed part of the front gallery furniture year in and year out, or swinging in the Mexican hammock out under the mulberry tree, or industriously overseeing the reconstruction of his asparagus bed, it should always be visible; and when the

stately, sky-piercing shaft stood complete, the Colonel felt that another monument had been reared to the name of Sims, and complacently regarded it as an exponent of his own good taste and progressive views. Not that he was Colonel Sims in those days. He was plain Benny Sims when he married his wife and built his gin. His title was simply another one of those accretions that came with the years and had no especial reference to deeds of valor performed by him at any juncture of his existence. It fitted him well, though, and he became it admirably, for the Colonel was tall and erect and his bearing was marked with a certain rigid punctilio that might well have been acquired in a military camp. No one ever heard the Colonel enter any demurrer against being brevetted Colonel beyond a mild "Pish!" or two, which were nullified by his prompt acceptance of the honor.

As the years go on the Colonel exhibits increasing inclination to draw sharp contrasts between the new and the old order of things, and in his capacity of general adviser to the younger planters about him never fails to make honorable mention of his own life-long habit of doing every thing systematically.

"You may think, boys" (the Colonel is spokesman), "that life was all a frolic on the plantation before the war, because we owned the hands and could work 'em to please ourselves. There's where you're out. There used to be lines of work on the place that you don't know any thing about, and hard lines at that. In those days you'd begin working in January, with no prospect of a let-up until Christmas came to give you a breathing-spell." Then, not with-

out pardonable gusto, the Colonel would indulge in a little game of comparison with his auditors, in which the past of his own active days always came out winner. "January meant hard work on the plantation in those days. It meant log-rolling and brush-burning and fence-mending and rail-splitting and road-patching. When a dead tree fell down in a field in those days, niggers didn't plow 'round it year after year until it had time to rot out of sight. No, sirs, log-rolling meant piling up every stump and fallen log and dead limb and making bonfires of 'em. And last year's cotton stalks and corn-stubble weren't knocked down and plowed under, in the slap-dash fashion of to-day—no, sirs ; they were raked up, and piled up, and set fire to, and a thousand-acre field, with a blazing bonfire about every ten feet or so, and young darkies feeding the fires like so many sprightly little devils imported for the occasion, wasn't a bad sight of a dark night. It was fun all round. And December ! What does December mean to you boys ? It means a lot of sulky freedmen sitting around in their cabins cussing you and the store-keepers and the commission merchants for their penniless condition, while they keep their heels warm with your fence-rails. It used to mean hog-killing time, and by the time eighty or a hundred fat hogs were hanging up in my smoke-house frozen stiff, the whole quarter lot was reveling in crackling bread, and backbones, and chitlings."

The Colonel never fails to bring his audience back to the present, with the pathetic admission that, "what was to be was to be, and he supposes it is all

for the best." His ambitions since the war are few and meager. Before the war they were many and laudable, never soaring into the realms of the unattainable. It was a point of honor with him that his "team" should go through the entire hauling season without breaking down. This is no idle boast with the planter. Mammoth cotton bales, weighing each 500 or 600 pounds, are to be hauled, piled toppling high on strong wagon bodies, to the shipping point, miles away, over roads that become almost impassable during the winter season; and the eight mules that are selected for this responsible undertaking are pampered and coddled months beforehand. The Colonel will recall for you now the name and pedigree of each one of the noble beasts of burden which bore this test without flinching, in the days when his crop numbered its thousands of bales. "There are no such teams left in the county now," he will tell you, with another one of his patient sighs, "because the teamsters and trainers belong to another school." One corner of the Colonel's hall is quite encumbered with guns of all sizes and descriptions. And across the rafters, under the roof of the back gallery, is an accumulation of fishing-rods that date back to the first ones "Fred" and "Al" ever tried to cope with. Before the war the Colonel asked no better sport than to hunt within the boundaries of his own estate.

Then, as soon as the crop was picked out and the fields could not be injured, it was his delight to have a lot of good fellows out from town for partridge, snipe, and duck-shooting. The partridges nested all

over his fields, then, and every man came with his own trained setter or pointer. A fair field and no favor. The man who shot a partridge before it was flushed was relegated to the dishonorable ranks of "pot-hunters"—"on the wing" or not at all. The Colonel had been very proud of his swampy bit of snipe-ground—the best in the whole State—and the guest who would tackle his duck pond and come back to the house without at least ten brace, was scarcely considered worth inviting another season. His room had better be given to a better man. But time has changed all that, and since the Colonel has had to contend for his own game with a multitude of boors who boast the possession of cheap guns and yellow curs, he has ceased inviting "good fellows" out from town to show their prowess on his snipe-ground and duck-pond, and his pleasures in that line are purely reminiscent.

It is pleasant to hear the Colonel talk of old times with the loquacity of increasing years. His reminiscences are impersonal and entertaining, and embrace the social, commercial, and political status of the county from the time when he first took charge of his plantation. His most violent dissipation then, as now, was his annual trip to New Orleans, made, generally, promptly on the heels of his first shipment of cotton to his commission merchants. It was a good time to visit one's merchant if the crop was turning out unexpectedly well, for a little bragging would be safe under the circumstances, and would have a mellowing effect on the merchant. It was an equally good time to visit him if the crop threatened

failure, for what "advances" were to be extracted from him must be secured before the shortage became apparent. If the merchant proves propitious, the Colonel is apt to wax a little reckless in expenditure. He will go to "the city" with a long list of necessities, prepared in solemn family conclave, ranging widely from a new riding horse for self and a Jersey cow for wife, down to a red plaid shawl for "Mammy's" Christmas gift. Mammy's name is never omitted from the list made out in family conclave. The children are all grown up, and the boys have all "passed over," but Mammy still holds sinecure office at the big house. The Colonel always enjoys his three or four days' stay in New Orleans with zest born of long abstinence. His mornings will be consumed in shopping and making arrangements for next year with his commission merchant, these arrangements, as a rule, consisting of promises on his part predicated on the uncertain issue of a crop unplanted, and on the merchant's side of reluctant concessions to palpable necessities. His afternoons will be spent at the race-course, for the Colonel, like all of his class, is a lover of horseflesh and interested in turf matters. His evenings he will devote to doing the theaters industriously. He will go back to the plantation as fresh as a boy after a holiday, carrying with him sundry boxes and barrels containing the materialized family list with supplement of his own compiling, together with food for animated converse for weeks, touching what he saw, said, and did while in *the city*. Events do not crowd so thickly into the Colonel's life as to dwarf this annual pilgrim-



age into a thing of no moment, and every detail of it is deemed worthy of being retailed circumstantially to the small but select audience that composes his home circle.

Not that he has no sources of entertainment more solid than this imported gossip. All his life he has been a rapid and omnivorous reader. He gets the "weeklies" from all the large cities, and you will always find on the book-table which stands in the great hall that divides his home into hemispheres, the *Philadelphia Times*, *The Nation*, the *New Orleans Times*, all of as late date as is possible in his locality, together with the leading magazines of the world. He does not skim them ; he reads them, and is better informed on the tariff and the Eastern question than many of the Congressmen who air their ignorance at the Capitol. The labors of his day close absolutely with the ringing of the six o'clock bell that calls in the field hands, and as public entertainments are not included in his plan of existence, his lamp-lit hours find him obliterating all the cares of the day in silent communion with some magnate of the kingdom of letters.

In one corner of the big central hall you will find a high, old-fashioned book-case and writing-desk combined. In the lower part of it the Colonel stows his "accounts of sales" and his few business letters. He keeps no books ; wouldn't be bothered with them. In the shelves above are the volumes, bound in sober colors, that keep the Colonel's mind fresh and alert in the best sense of the word, even if they do not sharpen his wits for contact with sharpeners.

There are certain plantation observances which the Colonel still holds by, although the significance of them has departed forever. One of these observances is the bringing around of his horse Billy, saddled, every morning at precisely the same hour, and the hitching of him to the horse-rack under the cottonwood tree, just outside the front gate. This performance has been gone through with every morning (unless the Colonel was in the city) since he came into possession of the place. Billy, like the Colonel himself, is gray and old, but the two understand each other very thoroughly, and as neither of them is as fiery as he used to be, they get along together admirably. Billy has an equine sense of the ludicrousness of the Colonel's thinking this regular morning round can possibly affect the status of the crops being worked by freedmen, but it is a groove he and the Colonel have fallen into, and he's not going to be the one to shirk ; so he stolidly nibbles the top rail of the horse-rack until he sees the Colonel come out of the front door with his slouch hat worn a trifle far back on his gray locks, with his trowsers tucked jauntily into his top-boots, and with his cowhide whip stuck under his arm while he draws on his buckskin gauntlets. The Colonel will have to be more thoroughly reconstructed than he is yet, before he can bring himself to ride around the place bare-handed. The entire white family will stand on the front gallery to watch his departure, quite as if he were going on a long journey rather than doing what he has done every morning from time immemorial, and he would feel as if a

serious slight were being put upon him if he should glance back from Billy's back and see only the weather-beaten front of the house, which, like Billy and himself, is also gray and old. It is a work of supererogation for him to hold the reins over Billy's neck, for the programme of their route is such an ancient and well-established one that any departure from it would astonish the Colonel himself scarcely less than Billy. They will go first through the quarter lot, where the cabins stand in two long rows, and where with the keen inspection of a landlord the Colonel will take in every new sign of decadence about the premises, with a hopeless sigh over his own inability either to stay or to cover up the ravages of time. He will dispense a few words of mild admonition to an irresponsible and thriftless tenantry before riding on, which will serve no other end than transient relief to the Colonel's righteous wrath. They, he and Billy, will pass systematically from squad to squad, watching the operations of plowing, planting, or picking, as the case may be, from which occupation the Colonel will turn away presently with a growing sense of his own insignificance. Time was when the pleasantest part of the morning's programme was the riding across his own boundary line, marked by the Willow Slough, into "Levison's field" on one side, or "Old Billy Scott's" on the other, to compare his own crops with those of his nearest neighbors, not in unkindly competition, but with a community of interest. But Levison moved to the city after the war, and there's nobody on his place but a lot of darkies, and Scott, poor old fellow, is dead, and things have changed so on both

places that the Colonel seldom cares to ride beyond the boundaries of his own place nowadays, unless it is mail-day, and then he and Billy will turn off through the chain-gate and ride a mile or two through the woods, where the low-hanging Spanish moss, as gray as his beard, smites him softly on the cheek, and the birds sing carelessly overhead in the trees, just as if this were a world where sorrow and change were quite unknown. If the mail-packet has arrived at the landing before him, the Colonel will gather his share and ride promptly back through the sweet-smelling woods, but if it has not, he will hitch old Billy alongside a waiting dozen or so of other horses, and seat himself composedly on one of the whittled wooden benches that support Sheldon's store gallery, and do what the other fellows are doing—wait and gossip. The pleasure has gone out of the waiting and the spice has gone out of the gossip of mail-day for the Colonel. His set has pretty much passed away, and the boys that have taken their places seem crude and pert to the Colonel. But to the boy planters he is an object of profoundest esteem and consideration. He knows so much, you know, and has such an affable way of imparting his information. A trifle grandiloquent, perhaps, but then the Colonel belongs to the old school. He is always in demand for the settlement of arguments, and in the matter of precedents he stands unrivaled.

What was once the Colonel's reproach is now his boast. He was not an original secessionist ; but when the thing was forced upon him he shouldered his share of the pain and responsibility like the hero that he

was. Not even when Fred's and Al's names stared at him from the ghastly list of the killed, that reached him in a ragged newspaper printed on wall-paper, did he flinch. He had leaned toward gradual emancipation, but witnessed the flight of his entire body of slaves with grim-visaged composure. He lived through the war with stolid endurance, coming to regard coffee and flour as among the superfluous luxuries demanded by an effete civilization, and emerged from the horrors of the carpet-bag era with the dignity of a Roman senator. In politics, it is needless to say that the Colonel is a Democrat, but he is so inured to defeat that his party's repeated discomfiture does not stir his pulse into higher activity.

The Colonel feels assured of a few things only in these latter days. Among them is the conviction that his own day is past. He looks backward without shame and forward without trepidation. He spends more time in the Spanish-leather chair on the front gallery than he used to do, and he always faces it toward the gin-stack. The gin-stack is one of the few things that have not changed. He looks forward with composure to the time when another brick vault will be needed in the flower-garden, and has had a certain corner recently cleared of encroaching brambles.

He likes to advise yet, and expends his most earnest efforts in that line on a young man who has bought the plantation just on the other side of Scott's. He would like this young man to perpetuate the Sims views and the Sims traditions in the county, and likes to think that since no son of his own loins will inherit

them, Mamie has selected so sensible a son-in-law for him. It will not be, after all, total annihilation for the Colonel's memory when he shall have joined the great caravan, and fear of that has been his chief cause of sorrow since Fred and Al left him. Pride of place will abide with the Colonel as long as he lingers above ground, and when they lay him under the star-jessamines, another type will have perished from off the earth.

## CHAPTER II.

### UNRECONSTRUCTED.

“UNRECONSTRUCTED” is what all the neighbors call her, but that terrible word is generally accompanied by pitying smiles that carry with them full and free condonation for all of pride, stubbornness, unreasonableness, and ill-blood that can possibly be conveyed in its five syllables. Looking at her from an archæologist’s point of view, one feels quite content that no reconstruction is ever likely to take place, she is such a rare specimen of the high-bred, high-principled, fastidious lady of the old school, the exclusive product of her own times. Even physically, she has the value of an old-time painting, whose lights and shadows have been laid on by a cunning hand, whose every soft curve, fold of drapery, pose, fashion of bodice, quaint coiffure, all have historic interest to the student of an era already become a thing of memories and traditions. By the aid of such finished specimens of Time’s handicraft as the Widow Somers, and the study of her life experience, one is able to reconstruct for himself the social and political period to which she belongs. Locally she is regarded with that sort of pride usually inspired by any tradition or landmark that carries with it a guarantee of respectability, and is cherished with the fostering care

one bestows on a rare old antique, which it would be impossible to replace. Indeed, with the delicate pink of her soft withered cheeks, where the fine grain of the skin is still traceable, with the clean-cut lines of her nose, ears, and lips; with the blue-veined tracery of temple and hand, and the sculpturesque folds of her black dress, she is very apt to make one recall a fine old cameo in some art collection. She is one of the few things in her neighborhood that have not undergone radical and pathetic changes since the war, and the muddy current of to-day's events sweeps by her door as unnoticed and uncared-for as if the great old rambling house, that can be seen only by glimpses from the public road through occasional lapses of foliage in the sheltering trees, were an enchanted palace, holding her, its sleeping princess, locked in oblivion.

Women are not good at ethical abstractions. Things are either good or bad, as they appeal to their own personality agreeably or otherwise, or as they affect the welfare of dearer objects than self. Neither the social nor political ethics of slavery had ever occupied the Widow Somers's mind for half a second. It was as much a matter-of-course that there should be slaves and slave-owners, she took it, as that there should be black men and white men, and as she had herself come of a long line of slave-owners (to doubt whose goodness and wisdom being a species of treachery she was utterly incapable of), she frowned down any ante-bellum discussion of this question as an unpardonable impertinence. The slaves, who loved her loyally and served her faithfully, were hers to have and to hold until death did them part, and whosoever




should undertake to usurp death's prerogative in this matter was an object of her most withering condemnation. It was like usurping the prerogative of Omnipotence, you see. She and "her people" had belonged to each other in mutual dependency forever and forever, it seemed to her, and she could conceive of no possibility of comfort for either side under a different state of affairs. There was Mammy (who still lives, a superannuated cumberer of the earth, sure of her physical comfort so long as "old Miss is 'bove ground"). Why, Mammy had been present at the birth of every one of her children, and together they had mingled their tears over more than one small mound, yonder under the clump of tall dark cedars in the corner of the orchard. Mammy had lived in the best cabin in the quarters for nearly all her life, and had been served with her meals from the family table ; what would become of her, turned loose in her helpless old age, to worry and skirmish over every mouthful of food she ate, and every stick of wood she burned ? No such horrible fate should ever befall Mammy so long as she could fend it off. And there was Puss, who had been about her ever since she could crawl up the front steps on all fours direct from the kitchen, where her mother was making things "hot" for something besides her culinary utensils, to take shelter behind "Miss's" skirts, fleeing from the wrath she was too young to comprehend—Puss, so handy and so hideous, whose cavernous mouth expanded so gratefully when her mistress praised her clear-starching, or her floor-scrubbing, or her increased conscientiousness in the matter of cob-

webs and dauber-nests. Of course it would be possible for Puss to make a livelihood as a free woman out of the many accomplishments she had herself taught her, but who else (certainly no Northern woman) would consent to have such a physical monstrosity near her on terms of such close intimacy? For Puss, intensely black, squat of form, flat-nosed and thick-lipped, was to be found of winter evenings crouching close in the chimney-corner of her mistress's sitting-room, gazing into the fire with wide-open eyes, as she dumbly absorbed "w'ite folks' talk." Would she, Mrs. Somers, be the only loser if those intermeddling abolitionists should ever succeed in carrying their wildly chimerical plans into execution? And John, her dining-room servant, whom she had trained to such a degree of perfection that her slightest nod conveyed a whole volume of directions. And Adelaide, her seamstress, who was such an adept in fitting and fashioning. Weren't they all just as happy as they could possibly be? What expense or responsibility rested on them? And when John and Adelaide had concluded to get married, didn't she dress Adelaide herself in her own white silk grenadine that she hadn't worn a dozen times, and put the veil and wreath on with her own hands, and have the wedding supper set down stairs in the basement, and ice the wedding cake herself, and have the Rev. Dr. Robinson out from town to see that the knot was tied decently and in order? Was any one going to take all that trouble for people who did not belong to them, and would not be with them for always? And there were the medicines and the flannels and the "Christmas gifts." Plainly, in Mrs.

Somers's estimation, all that was necessary to convert the most blatant freedom-shrieker to a firm belief in the beneficence of the Institution was that its workings should be fully understood and fairly investigated.

It is possible to keep the gaze fixed so firmly on one spot that every thing around and about that central object shall become blurred and obscured. Mrs. Somers had gazed upon the Institution from a pro-slavery point of view so long and so fixedly that the moral atmosphere which surrounded it was dense with confused and confusing mists. But she spent no thought on the mists nor on the menacing cloud into which they slowly but surely resolved themselves. Why should she? It would be as if one purposely marred the pleasure of smooth and rapid transit over an unobstructed railroad by horrible forebodings of possible smash-ups before the journey's end. The smash-up might come through somebody's blunder, but it was scarcely likely to come in her time, and there was a great deal to be enjoyed meanwhile on her exceedingly smooth-running line.

Yes, there were countless pleasant ante-bellum activities in the rambling old house that stands behind a grove of gnarled live-oaks and stately pecans, interspersed with the white locust, whose pendulous clusters of bloom make the air heavy with their sweetness in the spring-time. The house is much too large now. It was scarcely large enough then, especially when all "the children" were at home and impromptu gatherings kept the mistress, and Mammy and John and Puss and Adelaide and a score or two more of the black folks in a state of delightful excitement over



the festivities. The children were all grown up before the war. "All ready for the sacrifice," is the way she words it now. She was very proud of the three stalwart boys, who were so fond of measuring heights with each other and with their father on the rallying days when they gathered under the home-roof for some family or national anniversary. But whether the boys were at home or not, the hours were never too long for her in those full, sweet days. There were new violet beds to be set out, and cuttings from the beautiful Lamarque rose that clambered over the summer-house in the garden to be layered before the old stock should become woody and worthless, and there were the Hovey seedlings to be planted in the land best suited to that daintiest but most capricious of all the berries, and there were fresh vistas to be cut out in the skirt of woods that fills the hill-side between the house and the road. Not that there were any landscape views of particular beauty to be preserved from encroaching limbs and twigs, but because it was always desirable to see approaching carriages from a distance. And there were the red and white cypress vines to be trained annually over the ugly tree stump near the front gate, and the Madeira vines over the front gallery to be kept from bold usurpation of all the available space; and there were labels to put on all the translucent jellies and preserves that came to her in a state of perfection from Mammy's skilled hands. She pitied those of her neighbors who had to "worry" over their own preserves and pickles. She never did. She simply reaped the reward of the instructions she instilled into the receptive minds of her servants.

She never meant, when her boys should all be through with college, and come back home to her, that they should be ashamed of their mother, and find in her nothing better than a wrinkled-browed, fretful household drudge. She intended to fight off the inevitable rival of younger and fairer faces as long as possible. For the boys' sake, then, she kept up the music that had been one of the lures "the Judge" had fallen a victim to in his courting days. The piano grew old and asthmatic, and the melodies it sounded grew old-fashioned, and the Judge grew indifferent; the underlying purpose alone retained its pristine vigor. There was one of the boys still at college, and one reading law, and the other attending medical lectures in "the city." What a brilliant home circle she would have when they were all settled in the old neighborhood, "pursuing their careers!" So she forced herself to an abnormal interest in the newspapers, which the Judge devoured voraciously in semi-weekly batches, and kept herself familiar with the literature that was most likely to prove attractive to vigorous young minds "like the boys." "She was a great woman," the Judge would declare, in tones that defied contradiction, and whatever indication of unusual brightness scintillated from any one of the boys was accredited to her with self-abnegation unusual among men. So she reigned right royally as wife, mother, mistress, accepting the ease of her lot as a thing of course and immutable. And its soft, smooth conditions, entering into her own moral, mental, and physical mechanism, made of her the very sweet and gracious lady she was.

But there came the inevitable time when the cloud that had been rolling itself up from the unnoted mists through all those sunlit years, grew black and portentous, and burst with a threatening sound over her head. It stunned her at first. It was unprecedented. She could recall a precedent for almost every thing that had ever befallen her before. The sensation of being jolted out of a groove one has run in smoothly for nearly a lifetime is confusing and jarring you know. The smash-up had come, and in her time at that. Confusion and pride and resentment reigned supreme in those first days. Of course, nothing would be easier than to get the machine back on the track ; to which end every shoulder must be put to the wheel. She sent more than her fair quota of shoulders to the task—a father and three sons. Then she put her own to it. She lamented they were only a pair of feeble woman's shoulders and could only afford minor assistance, but the amount of that minor assistance that she afforded in the way of lint-scraping, and salve-concocting, and sock-knitting, and converting of her handsome stuff curtains into clumsy soldier shirts, and the like, was incredible. She worked hard, and late, and early. Her strength was fed by the fires of her indignation and her pride ; and then work was good for her when there was no sound of a boot-heel heard in the big empty rooms all day, no stray hat on chair or table to be decorously remanded to the useless rack in the hall, no sound of boyish whistling, no calling to the hounds, that strained at their leashes in eager anticipation of a run. She could even forgive them the cigar-smoke now, that had been such an abomi-

nation in her fastidious nostrils in the days just gone. But the good old times would come back again, and when her four heroes returned laurel-crowned they should find what a queen of finance she had proven herself to be. So the violet beds grew tangled and weedy, and the Lamarque cuttings died from neglect, and the strawberry beds were all runners, while the mistress of the old home grappled with graver matters and turned her attention to "running the place." It would be easy enough. Habits of life-long obedience would not be easily cast off at the bidding of a few restless spirits who had caught eagerly at the first far-away whisper of freedom. If defection seized upon every place in the country, she was sure of her people; they were bound together so indissolubly by ties of kindness that had strengthened the bonds of ownership.

Then came the day when astonishment swallowed up every other emotion and left her finally minus the power to re-resolve any thing. It was the day, when, standing on her front gallery, where the Madeira vines in ripened bloom were scattering their tiny stars in a fragrant shower on her head and shoulders, as she stood staring through the clustering tendrils, she saw a long mounted procession file past the front gate silently and decorously, but unfaltering in its defiant purpose. At the head of the procession were her own carriage and horses. In the driver's seat was her own coachman Maurice. Inside—she could see them all so horribly plainly—were John and Adelaide and Puss; her John, her Adelaide, her Puss. They had the grace not to look at her as she stood pale, wounded,

impotent, but moved on out of her sight forever, with their faces turned steadily away from her and toward freedom. Next in procession came the boys' ponies and the Judge's own riding horse, "Red Ben," that she was always afraid to see him mount. The ponies cantered by as gayly with their bare-foot, hatless, ragged riders, as if her own handsome sons were urging them forward. She hated the ponies for their ready transfer of allegiance, but "Red Ben" hung his proud head sullenly, as if conscious that he was being put to very base uses indeed. On they pass, men, women and children, some sending a half-apologetic look back over their shoulders, as if even in the supreme moment of emancipation it was not easy to omit the deference always shown heretofore to the stately lady gazing at them mutely from the vine-clad gallery of the big house. She never remembered how long she had stood looking at the vanishing procession. When the last tardy mule sprang forward under the prick of spur, and disappeared beyond the osage-orange hedging that bordered the plantation, a feeling as if she had been left alone to fill all space took possession of her and bowed her momentarily as some stately pine might bend involuntarily before the storm blast.

And to the day of astonishment succeeded the days of trial, when she gazed out in helpless impatience at the white waste of the cotton crop, which there was no one to pick, and saw marauding stock in full possession of the fat corn-fields, and watched the calves chewing the bark from the costly fruit trees the Judge had imported at such expense, and watched over so jeal-



ously, and knew there was no help for it all, for only a half dozen old people remained in the once populous quarters, and old Mammy and her husband, old Jake, were left in the yard "to do" for the mistress of the big house; when life seemed to resolve itself into endurance of hardship and indignity and suspense. It was then that the lines began to gather on the firm white forehead and mar its alabaster smoothness; it was then that she acquired that pathetic trick of pacing the long gallery with her arms patiently folded over such a heavy, heavy heart. All her plans of keeping up the place had come to naught, and the days were so horribly long and empty. It was easier pacing the gallery than sitting still in the large rooms waiting for the voices that were so long coming back to fill them with the olden music. She could see the big gate at the end of the pasture from the front gallery. Whatever or whoever should come to break this spell of lonely idleness and heart-sickness must come through that gate. The wooden latch was knocked off by two contending steers one night, and the gate sagged badly on its rusty hinges as it swung open, showing the muddy road under the dark trees beyond; but there was no need of mending the gate, or closing it either; there was nothing in the fields to protect. Nothing mattered much, anyhow, in those days of waiting.

There were those who would have had the Judge's wife leave the old homestead, and cast in her lot with others who were bearing a like burden of suspense and anxiety, but she had one answer for them all. She gave it kindly, graciously, gratefully, if you please,

but always firmly : " She could not sleep under any other roof. Mammy and Jake would take care of her well enough, and she must wait for *them* at home." She never put it into words exactly who she must wait for, for perhaps—only perhaps—some of them might not come back to her. So she stayed all alone in the big empty house until the Madeira vine had shed all its stars, and spent all its sweetness, until the soft purple bloom of the China trees had passed into the hard yellow ugly balls of their seed-time, and the pink clouds of the crape myrtle had been scattered by the pitiless rains and winds that spared no thing of beauty in the large front yard, excepting the sturdy oaks and the towering pecans that were able to defy the bluster of the elements.

And to the day of trial succeeded the day of despair, when she paced the long gallery at fitful intervals all day until the darkness hid from her strained gaze the sagging gate and the road beyond, lying back under the shadows of the moss-bearded trees, looking for tidings that never came, yearning for forms that could not come, for the river was blockaded and the siege of Vicksburg was raging hotly, and there was nothing to do at home but watch and wait. She could hear the guns at Vicksburg—far away, muffled by distance, but as each shot fell on her strained ear, her wounded heart gave a quick fierce throb. Who knew where that shrapnel had burst? Who knew—who would tell her and shorten the agony of the long silent moments that fell between? There were lives in that beleaguered city she would gladly have laid down her own for. But there was nothing for her to

do but watch and wait and wonder why the vials of wrath should have been emptied so fully on her head. Women are rarely impersonal—suffering women never are.

And to the day of despair succeeded the day of lamentation. When the far-off muffled guns of Vicksburg were silenced ; when the nearer, quicker, louder detonations from the gun-boats in the river told the story of Lee's surrender ; when straggling soldiers, footsore and weary, found their way back in tatters and in defeat to ruined homes ; when the long time of waiting came to an end, and through the sagged gate which had stood open for three fruitless years, there wandered afoot a man in a worn gray uniform, listless of step, lack-luster of eye, tired of body, tired of heart, tired of soul. A ragged beard fell far down on his breast, he stooped as he walked, and stopped every now and then to cough. He knew he was at home, for whatever else might have happened, the old place could not have moved ; but it all looked strange. The trim hedging was unkept and ragged, and the shutters of the house had a rowdyish, dissipated look, as they flapped dismally to and fro on broken hinges, and the tall insolent coffee weeds in the front yard seemed more at home than he as he parted them with a thin trembling hand to expedite his progress up to the front steps, where a gray-haired woman stood eying him curiously and hesitatingly, not daring to trust to the mother instinct alone in behalf of this poor human wreck.

That was all that ever came back to her ; a witless paroled prisoner, too much of a mental wreck to grieve

with her over the universal devastation. He brought her no news of the others. His three years of service had been spent in a military prison.

She took up her marred life as best she could. Around the wreck of her one restored child the torn tendrils of mother love have twined themselves deathlessly. No one has ever heard any noisy outburst against the decree of high heaven. She is not consciously submissive. She is simply carrying out the practice of a lifetime by bearing the inevitable with dignity. The place has resumed activity on a new basis. Strange faces fill the old cabins, strange names are on her plantation books. She takes no interest in them, nor they in her. She rents them her land and houses for so many pounds of lint-cotton and so many bushels of corn. She is the "Widder Somers" to them, and they are her tenants. They are not "her people," and she is not their "ol' Miss." They stand on a cold business platform, and are mutually watchful. And because she still mourns for those who never came back to her, because she still weeps with those who weep, but refuses to rejoice with those who rejoice ; because she turns away with a sick heart from the bitter mockery of Decoration Day to wonder where *her* dead are sleeping ; because she is a woman and not a philosopher ; because she is not content that a nation's everlasting weal has been built upon the ruins of her own life and home ; people call her unreconstructed.

## CHAPTER III.

### CAPTAIN TOM.

EVERY man, woman, and child, black and white, living between Vicksburg and New Orleans, along the line of Mississippi River travel, knows of him if they do not know him, this great rugged Captain Tom, with the voice of a lion and the heart of a girl ; and what with his fifty years of going up and down the watery highway that leads right by their door-yards, he must needs have been as unimpressible as the gay effigy of the Indian chief that is perched aloft on the pilot-house of his big steamboat, not to have gotten his heart-strings inextricably tangled up with those that beat under the various familiar roof-trees he sees from his hurricane deck twice every week, once as he goes up stream under a pressure of steam and rush of hurrying paddle-wheels, scattering a miscellaneous cargo, and again when he travels city-ward more leisurely, stopping to pick up a couple of bales of cotton here, a pile of cottonseed there, now to take on a shivering passenger whose whereabouts have been revealed by the flickering flame of an exhausted bonfire, or again landing amiably in response to a fluttering handkerchief held aloft in a girl's small hand.

He belongs properly to the flush period of steam-boating on the Mississippi River, and no one knows better than he does that the glory of it is departed forever ; but in spite of intruding railroads and waning river traffic, he still holds the helm stiffly against all adverse currents, and when he shall have pulled the great bell-rope on his hurricane deck for the last time, and silently shall have submitted to the pilotage of the grim ferryman, another type will have been obliterated from time's blurred tablets ; for the changed condition of affairs precludes the possibility of another generation of Captain Toms.

He knows every bend and curve and point on the river between Vicksburg and New Orleans, and can tell you on the darkest night, within a fraction of a mile, where he is and how long it will take him to make the next bend. It is with a solemn sense of the march of the years that he will point you to a barren sandbar here, and tell you of the broad rich acres and the stately ginhouse and the pretty homestead he has seen engulfed little by little by the merciless waves that now lap the glistening sands of the bar with a murmur as soft as a mother's lullaby. It is with a sense of personal antiquity that he will tell you all about the Raccourci cut off as you shoot through it now standing by his side on the roof of the Texas, which once he had to circumvent by twenty tedious miles. " He was younger then," he will tell you with a deep-chested sigh, not that he looks old now, or ever will suggest senility any more than the grand oaks, with their widespreading branches that bourgeon afresh every year, for there is a perennial freshness that

springs from Captain Tom's heart and keeps him young. In the ladies' saloon, over the grand piano, hangs a portrait in an elaborate gilt frame. It is the portrait of a man with a large round head, covered with short, curly, black hair. In the portrait are a pair of keen black eyes, that look out on the world from under shaggy black eyebrows, like awnings. The man in the portrait has an iron jaw and a firm-set mouth that seems made for words of command. There is a merry twinkle in the black eyes, and there are amiable curves in the corners of the firm-set mouth ; but it is not a handsome face, that pictured face of Captain Tom "in his thirties." Out on the decks to-day, in storms that blind or in heat that blisters, buttoned to the chin in his great shaggy "dreadnaught," or divested of every article of clothing that civilized man can dispense with in the dog days, treads the original of the portrait, square shouldered and square-jawed, and upright as of old ; but the curly hair is a grizzled gray, and the keen black eyes look out on the world from under bleached awnings. The elements have dealt kindly with him. He is their own familiar, and they have transmuted some of their subtle forces into his hardy veins by an alchemy known only to themselves. Nor wind, nor rain, nor heat, nor cold hold any terrors for him ; they pay him tribute in rich blood and boundless vigor.

When Captain Tom leaves port with a full complement of passengers, his sense of responsibility is great, but not overpowering. "Never missed a trip or lost a steamer," is the eulogy he is proudest to hear passed upon him, and it would quite satisfy him in

the matter of an epitaph. Helmsman, host, politician, pilot, commander and caterer, are all combined in his potent personality. His word is law throughout the length and breadth of the stately craft that is at once the pride of his life and the cause of sleepless vigilance in him. His intelligent supervision extends from the man at the wheel, into whose keeping precious lives are confided, to the steward, whose duty it is to cater to capricious feminine appetites. Nothing that involves the welfare of his passengers, who are for the time being his honored guests, is too onerous or too trivial for his interest. Planters along his route place their wives and daughters under his care for trips to "the city" with as complete a sense of security as when they intrust their entire crops to him for transmission to the hands of the commission merchants who hold liens on them. Women and children sleep peacefully under the low ceilings of their state-rooms on Captain Tom's boat, satisfied to know that the heavy crouching footfall that sounds sometimes as if it must come through the thin planks over their heads, is an indication that he is "making the rounds," and whether the huge paddle-wheels revolve slowly and cautiously through the thick, white fog, or the steamer crashes recklessly into the drift-piles that impede her progress, or plunges forward through smooth waters with quick, palpitating sighs and fiery breath, there is a cool head and a keen eye on the alert for their welfare, and drowsy blessings follow close upon the crouching footfalls.

Captain Tom is no mere fetcher and carrier. His interest in the dwellers upon the familiar banks



between which his boat plies her busy way up and down, year in and year out, is not simply that of a man who "makes his living out of them." He knows the members of every household whose roof-tree is visible from the hurricane-deck of his steamer. He knew the Evans place, one of the "brag" sugar plantations on the coast, when it was nothing but a clearing with a few rude shanties scattered about among the tree stumps. He will point you to the stately mansion only partly visible now from behind its sheltering grove of live-oaks and pecans, and tell you, with a sort of proprietary interest in it, how he brought "every stick of timber in it, down to the doors and sash," up from the city for Evans when he concluded to get married and live on the place himself, and, as the selection of the wedding-ring and of the parlor furniture was left to Captain Tom, he naturally considers that he holds no inconsiderable share of responsibility for Evans's weal or woe. That was a long time ago, however—long enough for the oaks and the pecans that were saplings when he landed with Evans's wedding-cake to grow up into stately shade trees and almost hide the house from the river. When Evans brought his oldest daughter aboard a few trips back, and shipped her to the school of the Sacred Heart, down near the city, under Captain Tom's care, he said it made him feel awfully old.

He will tell you that he must stop at Black Hawk Point going down, whether there's any cotton on the bank or not, because when he landed coming up, to put off a lot of sugar-house molasses, Colonel Staves sent aboard for a lump of ice and they told him Mrs.

Staves had swamp fever. He's had "a lot of jellies and other sick folks' gim-cracks" made by his pastry cook for her. Money won't buy sick folks' victuals on the plantations. He and Mrs. Staves have been "running" together ever since he's been steamboating, and she shan't want for any thing it's in his power to procure for her. Mrs. Staves will wait a week for Captain Tom's boat or give up her trip to the city altogether, rather than go with any one else. She is convinced that if mortal man can put travel by steam beyond the peradventure of death by a "blow-up," Captain Tom is that mortal, and Captain Tom rewards her appreciation by never forgetting to send something good up to the house—a can of oysters, or a red fish, or a big bunch of bananas. Sometimes a return comes immediately in the shape of a bucket of fresh buttermilk (the Captain has bucolic tastes, despite his maritime training); on other occasions Mrs. Staves and the girls will go to the end of the front gallery and wave their thanks and greetings with their handkerchiefs.

Captain Tom comes as near achieving ubiquity as mortal can. At the first shrill whistle for a landing he appears promptly and conspicuously on deck, where his keen eye follows the slow, swinging motion of the ponderous craft until her pointed bow touches the sandy bank with scarce more force than would be required to crack an egg-shell. If it's only a lot of freight to take on, he will stand ready to pull the bell-rope as the last roustabout trots briskly across the stage plank with box or sack on shoulder, but if any of "the boys" are on the bank, there are "howdy-

do's " to be waved with hat and hand, cordial invitations to be shouted from his strong lungs to "come aboard and have something." If time permits, the invitation is rarely needed, and seldomer declined, and Captain Tom will placidly command that "her nose be held to the bank " until he has ordered a julep or cock-tail mixed at the bar for his visitors, and has sent them ashore with the latest newspaper in their hands and half-a-dozen good cigars in their side-pockets. While the refreshment is being prepared and disposed of he will make himself acquainted with the state of the crops and the probable date of first shipments of all the plantations for miles inland. For he is not afraid of asking questions, and his curiosity is in the legitimate line of business. No one knows when he takes his rest. Up in the Texas (a tier of state-rooms on the upper deck devoted to the officers) is a little den known as the " Captain's room," but no one ever catches him napping in it. The boat never stands, day or night, that his clear commanding voice is not heard from the hurricane deck. Between whiles a huge heap of shaggy overcoat and soft hat and grizzled hair and weather-beaten cheeks may be seen for a few seconds at a time in a state of semi-unconsciousness in an arm-chair in the " Social Hall," as the lower cabin is called, but not for long. There's a lot of ladies back in the cabin he has promised to "look after," and some youngsters who have been begging to be taken up in the pilot house, or a row between the mate and the roustabouts is to be settled, and he must not forget to remind the barber about that preparation for bald heads he promised Colonel Wiggins to put off

the next time they landed at his place, and there's the bridal state-room to be got ready for Ned Benson's daughter. Ned told him the young people were going down with him when he came back, and he's going to give them "a regular spread" before they get to the city.

Nothing disconcerts Captain Tom quicker than a glum-looking crowd of passengers. With a large sense of personal responsibility for their spirits and appetites, as well as their bodies, he caters industriously to the tastes of all. There's a band for the young people to dance by after the supper tables are cleared away, and there's the universal resource for the male travelers, the card tables, down in the Social Hall. He will stand over the players at odd moments and take a lively interest in the game if it is a gentleman's game, played to relieve the tedium of a long, slow trip to the city, but if any sharp practice is discovered, or Captain Tom has reason to believe a "blackleg" has found his way into the group about the table, his denunciation of him is open and merciless, and the girl element in the rugged old sea lion is completely obscured in the roar of his wordy indignation.

The walls of the clerk's office are hung thick with "testimonials of regard" that have accumulated on Captain Tom's hands in the many years of his public service, and it is pleasant to hear the old man tell the story of each one, with the invariable final clause: "He never could quite see into it. He'd never done any thing special for the donor, but folks always did treat him better than he deserved."

Captain Tom's life is divided into three epochs. One

dates from the time when he was lying alongside a lot of steamers at the levee in New Orleans, when one of them caught fire, and among the passengers who sprang from the burning deck to his own for safety was a beautiful young lady who afterwards became Mrs. Tom. She has one of the loveliest of homes in the Crescent City, and every week, as soon as his cargo has been safely deposited on the wharf at New Orleans, Captain Tom goes home as fast as hack horses can carry him. The atmosphere he lives in during his two or three days in port is in sharp contrast with his deck life. It is a life of smooth happenings, of luxurious surroundings, of refined influences, and the lion voice is modulated accordingly. He has a great deal to hear in that short period of time, for there are boys and girls passing through the agitating period of school and college days, and there are numerous domestic contingencies to be provided for, all of which is delightfully entertaining to Captain Tom. But he disports himself in his wife's beautiful parlors somewhat after the manner of an estray walrus, and fragile things frequently come to grief during his limited sojourn. He feels vastly uncomfortable in the dress-coat that supersedes his dreadnought on shore, and dearly as he loves the whole brood whose nest he has feathered so softly, he breathes a trifle freer when he once more finds himself on his own deck, with the gulf breezes blowing his gray locks about and the forest of masts at the levee growing small in perspective.

The second epoch takes in the war. Captain Tom was not an original secessionist, but when the thing became inevitable he went into it with the ardor he

throws into every thing he does. When the river was blockaded, life became practically aimless to him. There was nothing he could do. He mourned particularly over the fact that he had put a brand-new boat into the trade just before the "racket commenced." Yes, there was one thing he could and did do. He could keep "her" (his boats are his lady-loves) from falling into the enemy's hands, to be made into a gun-boat. Her pretty sides should never be punched into port-holes, through which black-mouthed cannon might belch fire and smoke at the boys in gray. Nothing was easier than to run her up the Yazoo and let her catch fire accidentally. He stood on the bank and watched her burn, through a mist that obscured the brightness of his keen eyes, but he never wished her back. She was his own, and he had put it out of her power to become a terror to the people who had always greeted her coming with smiles of welcome. That was all. After that he went back to the home in the city and "loafed," extracting what comfort there was to be extracted from the cultivation of cabbages and roses in the daytime, employing every idle moment with plans of the boat he was going to build as soon as the war was over. One of Captain Tom's harmless hallucinations is that he is an authority on the culture of cabbages and roses, and since the period of his enforced activity in that line he has dispensed volumes of unsolicited advice on the subject with sublime conceit.

The third and most important epoch in his life dates from the "big race," and as the years glide by and the old sea lion inclines slightly toward garrulity, the

story of the big race is heard oftener and the details grow fuller, and his own reminiscent joy over the result more keen. To hear Captain Tom tell in tones that vibrate with resuscitated indignation of the taunts that were flung at the new boat by her most puissant rival, and the partisanship that was splitting all the riparian folk into factions, and of his final challenge to a race that should settle forever the supremacy of the best steamer, is to hear him in his most eloquent vein. To follow him through the frenzied zeal of preparation, when he stripped "her" of every superfluous pound of weight, even to the sash in the pilot-house and the heavy cabin furniture; when hogsheads of bacon and barrels of oil were held in reserve as possible fuel; when would-be passengers were warned off the boat as from a magazine of explosives, is to feel one's pulse begin to thrill with anticipatory excitement, and to experience the pangs of incipient partisanship. To see his huge chest heave and expand, his bright keen eyes flash under their white pent-houses of brows, his ponderous fist emphasize the rapidity with which "she took Roundout Point," or "leaped like a greyhound around Dennises Bend," or "skimmed the water like a sea-gull, from the Hunt Place to Crooked Bayou," is to see the race yourself, and to participate in all of Captain Tom's tense fluctuations of fear and hope. Nothing on earth will ever again have power to stir his whole being to frenzied effort as did the big race, and no river contest will ever come up for discussion that will not have to stand the test of comparison with that supreme effort.

Captain Tom's boats are no mere things of wood and

iron skillfully combined with a view to running properties. They are living, moving, sentient things to him, and he will recall for you the qualifications of every boat that has called him master with the tender, lingering tones of one who mourns some loved and companionable human friend. Praises bestowed upon "her" are as sweet to his ears as are the praises of her first-born babe to a fond young mother. But Captain Tom is not specially partial to his first-born; it is his last-born, his Benjamin, the winner of the big race, that taxes his powers of eulogy to the utmost.

No local politician is better posted in the game of chance that puts one man in office and another out, than Captain Tom, and he resents the imputation that because he is afloat he is without the pale of interest. The era of the carpet-bagger filled his honest breast with righteous wrath. He takes mild satisfaction in chaffing his Northern passengers on the mythical terrors of the Kuklux Klan against whom he pledges himself to protect them with the last drop of blood in his veins. He knows what all the politicians at Washington are doing and what they are leaving undone, and considers that the bill for the improvement of the Mississippi River is the only one of any importance that has been brought before the house for an age. He hasn't much faith in any of the ideas modern marine engineers have brought to bear on that irrepressible stream, and wouldn't give an ounce of practical common-sense for all the scientific theories in the world. He opposes his views, as an experienced and observant river man, boldly against the men of



science, and those who think Captain Tom "is in the right of it" are not hard to find.

In the holidays, that is, in the week that falls just before Christmas, his boat and himself become the dispensers of a solid stream of comfort that is only exhausted when he reaches the wharf boat and Vicksburg. Poor and insignificant indeed must that planter be who "ships" by Captain Tom without being remembered in his annual distribution of black cake, (made and handsomely iced in the steward's pantry), oranges, oysters, and bananas. If there is something of policy in this, there is more of friendship, and as the seasons come and go, and the boat comes and goes, the bond that binds the old captain to his landed constituency waxes stronger and is held more precious, for the weal of one is the weal of the other—they stand or fall together.

## CHAPTER IV.

### OL' MISS.

IN a great rambling old house which travelers on the Fayette Road can not even catch a glimpse of for the jealous guardianship of acres of live-oaks, magnolias, and dogwoods that spread their sheltering arms about it, one perfect specimen of this almost extinct species is still to be found. The first glimpse of the casket that contains this gem of purest ray serene is disappointing. The "casket" is locally known as "Magnolia Hall." Its boundary fence, a dilapidated, worn affair, stretches for several miles alongside the red-clay road that has an incurable propensity for running into gulches and wash-outs. With phenomenal lack of foresight on somebody's part, or malice prepense on the part of inanimate things, one of the most incurable of these gulches is immediately in front of the big gate that leads from the road to the door of the Hall. One of the local problems that time has yet to solve is how to circumvent the "bad place" at the Magnolia gate in winter. People who are easily discouraged do not try to circumvent it; they simply avoid it on wheels, which has a tendency to increase the isolation of the big rambling white house behind the sheltering trees;

but the current of life flows through it with an independent full sweep of its own.

Against the inner walls of this old house, which is perched on its crumbling terraces with monumental dignity, hang two oil portraits in gilt frames of such marked difference in style and costliness that they mutely tell the story of financial decay that has been going on steadily at Magnolia Hall for the last quarter of a century. But they tell another and a still more pathetic story of the ravages of time. The oldest portrait, the one with the gorgeously heavy frame (it hangs in the up-stairs bedroom with the dormer window now), is the picture of a very slim young lady sitting preternaturally erect in a stiff-backed chair. Her shining black hair is combed smoothly over the brow, from which it takes a sudden and violent departure in two hemispherical bandeaux of immense circumference ; the head is turned sufficiently sidewise to give a view of loop upon loop of broad flat braids hanging low upon the smooth white nape of her neck. One bright red rose rests against them. Above the slim waist, the blue silk belt holds in bondage sweet, a companion rose to the one among the braids, the whole picture, with its soft white throat, its ripe red lips, and large innocent eyes, looking out on an untried world with shy interest, suggests some bright-hued flower springing from a mound of snow ; for below the waist there is an expanse of white drapery whose circularity convicts "ol' Miss" of having worn "tilters" of the extremest capacity in her youth. Her husband had this picture painted before the honeymoon had waned. The silver

flagree bouquet-holder, full of red roses, that hangs in the picture, suspended from the silk belt by a slender chain, and the big white feather fan clasped in her slim hands, were among the wedding presents. Ol' Miss calls it a foolish picture now, and has put it in the least frequented room in the house, but if any one of unusual discernment insists upon it that they can still see the likeness, a pretty pink flush will mount high in her cheeks, which are no longer round and plump and smooth.

The other portrait, the one in the cheap frame, hangs over the parlor mantle-shelf. The hair in that one is white and thin. Adown the cheeks, hanging pendent from the widow's cap that crowns them, are gauze ribbon strings, purple and white. For the rest, a clinging black dress supplies the space once filled up by the red roses and the bouquet-holder and the big fan and the clouds of voluminous white drapery. The eyes, in this later picture, seem to look out patiently upon a world which has been tried and found wanting, no longer with shy interest, but with a sort of experienced gravity that gives them a more soulful look, and the hands, brown and worn now, are folded in a restful attitude, as if "ol' Miss" were simply waiting for the end.

Which is exactly what she is not doing. That is ol' Miss on canvas. If portrait-painters can not idealize their subjects, they are practically useless, for we paint portraits for posterity, and posterity objects, or will object, to crudity of any sort. Ol' Miss, the living, busy, loving entity, only folds her hands restfully of evenings, when the last key is turned in the last lock (that is the

poultry-yard key most likely), and the evening stars are twinkling over her head, as she rocks placidly in the cool darkness of the front gallery if it is summer, or knits mechanically, with her serene eyes following the dancing flames of the wood fire as they leap up the cavernous chimney in her own bedroom, if it is winter. There is a big parlor at Magnolia Hall, and a small library, and a cozy dining-room as good as a parlor, when the leaves are taken out of the extension table and it is converted into a center table, with an embroidered felt cover on it; notwithstanding all of which "ol' Miss's" bedroom is the family sitting-room in winter. In summer the sewing-machine and the writing desk and the book table are all located in the big hall, and every body sits there. Ol' Miss smiles with triumph as one after one "the children" gravitate towards her bedroom of evenings. They assign various false reasons for doing so. One of the boys, the one that is studying law, declares the lamps in mother's room always give a better light than his own; another one of the children, whose six feet of length demands extra space, asserts positively that all the comfortable chairs in the house are in mother's room; but no one agrees with her that it is her wood fire they are hankering after.

After the war, when labor was uncertain, the Judge had grates put all over the house, for the wood-pile was more than ever given to unaccountable fluctuations, and he hauled coal from town at great expense and trouble; but when the brick masons who were filling up all the huge fire-places reached ol' Miss's room, she paralyzed them by assuming a tragic

attitude and paraphrasing an old song for their benefit, or rather for the Judge's benefit, who looked at her over their brick-dusted shoulders in comical dismay. She defied them to touch a single brick—declaring that in youth it had warmed her and she'd preserve it then. She abhorred coal fires, and as long as there was a tree standing on the Magnolia place, she would have her wood fire if she had to pick up fagots like the old women in the Black Forest. The vision of ol' Miss picking up the fagot of the future to warm her aging bones was too much for the Judge's equanimity. She carried the day, and the chimney still yawns widely in her room and the wood-fire still crackles on the brass andirons, and the slate hearth with green spots in it still interposes its dark smooth surface between the glowing logs and all the feet that are left in the home circle.

Close up against one of the jambs, by the window that overlooks the dairy and the henyard and the vegetable garden, is ol' Miss's workstand—a little square mahogany affair that is not independent of the support furnished it on two sides by the projection of the chimney and the wall by the window. A big Indian basket, toppling high with cut-out work or disabled wearing apparel, is its principal ornament. A fat little red cushion, bristling with pins and needles, cowers always under the caves of the big basket, but never so successfully that it can not be found by every vagrant seeker after a pin or needle, who comes straightway to the workstand, sure of making good there every deficiency. Close by the workstand is a low armless rocking-chair, with a home-made cushion covered with

bright calico on the seat. The home-made cushion is a veritable cloak of charity, for underneath it is a network of seine twine that ol' Miss has criss-crossed recklessly through and through the failing cane bottom. It is an inviting little old chair, but no one ever thinks of occupying it unless the absence of ol' Miss's sun bonnet from the rack in the hall indicates her presence in the garden, the smoke-house, or elsewhere outdoors. Perhaps the gleam of its bright green checks may be traced by the line of the osage-orange hedging, as she meditatively follows in the wake of a turkey-hen who, with stately deliberation and furtive caution, stalks slowly on the other side of the hedging, prospecting for a nest. A still more infallible indicator of ol' Miss's whereabouts is her key-basket. Whenever it joins company with the fat red pincushion, or the overloaded Indian basket on the little brass-mounted stand, then she is at ease in the armless rocking-chair, which is just of the proper height to permit of her seeing if Butler is working that asparagus bed precisely as she directed him, or if Mandy is scrubbing the floor of the dairy with sand, instead of just "slopping it over," or if Sandy is putting fresh straw in the duck's nest, and not pelting the young ducks with broken egg-shells, a favorite *divertissement* of Sandy's when he is quite sure ol' Miss's eye is not upon him from the window shaded by the pink crape myrtle. But, as Sandy is never quite sure of any thing in this world, the young ducks suffer no material damage at his hands, and sooner or later the fresh straw will be laid in the nests according to directions ; for, if Sandy may be said to have grappled successfully with a single conclusion in

his reckless young life, it is a conviction of the utter inutility of trying to evade a command of ol' Miss's.

Ol' Miss will manage to sandwich a good many stitches in between those excursive glances that she sends toward the garden or dairy or poultry-yard. Or, if the work in the Indian basket is not of a very pressing nature, perhaps she will read through the entire editorial page of last week's New Orleans *Sunday Times*, or one chapter of 'Middlemarch' before her next excursion. She is like a well-drilled fireman or veteran in camp. The faintest intimation that her presence is needed finds her alert and ready for action; never at a loss what to do or when to do it; never seen in action without her side-arms as represented by her key-basket. There were enough keys in that basket to have started a reasonable locksmith in business. Not one of them, however, could have been dispensed with. According to ol' Miss there was a moral attached to the carrying of so many keys, not apparent to superficial observers. Slack stewardship on her part would be the putting of temptation in the way of those not trained to resist it. "Her people" should never be led into temptation by her own neglect of duty. Her slaves were more than chattels to her, and among the many onerous duties she considered to be in her own peculiar province was the care of the benighted souls that inhabited their well-fed and well-clothed bodies. If there was not much system in ol' Miss's kingdom, there was an immense amount of activity to make up for it, and times and seasons could be correctly connoted by a blind man with an ear attent to her movements.



When the big smoke-house key, so big that ol' Miss's key-baskets were always purchased with regard to its mammoth proportions, was most frequently in requisition, the armless rocking-chair was almost deserted and the nucleus of the family gatherings was to be found occupying a kitchen chair, with hot bricks under her feet, out at the smoke-house while she directed and supervised the labors of a score of grinning darkeys, reveling in the toothsome perquisites of hog-killing time. Who but herself could so nicely adjust the spice to the quivering mass of "cold souse" before it went into the molds, or discriminate between half a pinch more or less of powdered sage for the sausage-meat, or see that the sugar-cured hams were not saltpetered beyond redemption? If you wanted to interview ol' Miss during the period of these rites and ceremonies, you must either bide your time or carry yourself and your petitions to the remote end of the big back yard, where in the clumsy house of heavy logs, which were blackened by the ascending smoke of untold annual sacrifices to Epicurus, she was to be found commanding, exhorting, entreating, upbraiding, approving, in that low slow voice of hers which carried with it the power of a despot's decree, with none of its harshness.

In the spring-time, when the plum trees grew white with their dainty sprays of sweet-scented blossoms, and the peach-trees grew pink, and the blackbirds chatted to each other from the tasseling twigs of the pecans, and the dogwood shed its summer snows unnoticed in untrodden by-paths of the forest, ol' Miss would make the garden her head-quarters, and there,

seated on the camp-chair which had such a fatal tendency to collapse suddenly under her, with her starched gingham sun-bonnet shutting out all of the world but that portion that came immediately within the radius of the cylindrical opening in front, with her seed-box by her side, and "White's Gardening for the South" opening of itself at "artichokes" on her lap, she reveled in prospective over the peas and radishes and pale-tinted lettuce which were to make their appearance on her table fully a week before Mrs. Westerman had any. She especially gloried in Mrs. Westerman's discomfiture, because Mrs. Westerman always insisted on having a high-priced gardener from New Orleans, while ol' Miss contented herself with Butler, between whom and herself honors were easy on the spring garden.

When the year was growing mellow and the pink and white of orchard bloom had passed into the time of fruition, it was absolutely vain to look for ol' Miss anywhere but under the apricot-tree near the back door, where she camped out, as it were, and held high carnival among her great porcelain-lined preserving kettles, and her little charcoal furnace, and great baskets of figs, and peaches, and apples, and pears, and mountains of white sugar, which, through slow and laborious processes, were transmuted into quivering jellies and transparent preserves that accumulated on the shelves of the "lock closet," until one did not know which to marvel at most, the possibility of their manufacture on such a large scale, or the probability of their consumption. But ol' Miss had her private standard of the adequate, and no inducement could

be offered to make her stay her hand in preserving-time until the regulation number of short, fat jars of plum preserves, and long, lean jars of brandy peaches, and tumblers of quince and apple jelly had come up to that standard.

On the mantelpiece in ol' Miss's bedroom stands a solid mahogany box that opens with little folding doors in the front, and a sliding panel in the back. It is her medicine chest, and every inch of space in it is crowded with little square bottles of many-colored mixtures, some in a liquid condition, others powdered. Certain of these bottles have never had the white kid removed from their stoppers; others have been replenished over and over and over again. Those that have been replenished oftenest are labeled "Calomel," "Quinine," "Ipecacuanha," and "Epsom Salts." She does not believe that human flesh is heir to any ill that will not yield to these sovereign remedies of hers, provided they are applied with skill and promptness. She is herself both skillful and prompt and that case, either at the "big house" or in the quarters, must be grave indeed if other aid than can be furnished by ol' Miss and her medicine chest be called for. Few are the cabins in the quarters that can not furnish some pleasant legend of visits from ol' Miss, made in the small hours of a winter's night or despite the fierce raging of a summer thunder-storm. Fewer still are the cabins in the quarters of Magnolia Hall that have not their humorous or regretful story to tell of the times when it was ol' Miss's Sunday morning practice to walk up one side of the quarter street and down the other on a

mute tour of inspection, and the cabin that showed an unswept front, or an untidy interior, or a reckless disregard for that cleanliness which the mistress ranked next to godliness, was in a bad case so far as any favors in the way of "bonny clabber" from the big house dairy, or cabbage plants to set out in their truck patches from Butler's glass beds were to be hoped for.

When winter put a temporary stop to all her pleasant industries and drove her in upon herself; when the washouts and the gulleys in the red-clay hilly road between her and her neighbors put a period to all sociability, ol' Miss saw the carriage relegated to the carriage-house without a sigh. There is so much to do. All the winter clothes for the quarters to have cut out and made, and then it is a good time to catch up with the new books. They come out so dreadfully fast nowadays. The bishop always stopped at Magnolia Hall when he paid his visit to the neighborhood. Whether it was because ol' Miss's father was a minister or because the Magnolia Hall table was celebrated for its baked turtle and its buckwheat cakes, who shall say? He did not find it hard to prolong his visit. Some of the hollow conventionalities of city life might be missing, but all of life's gentle and genuine refinements were there, and when ol' Miss took her place behind the old family silver tea-set, dressed in her sculpturesque black, with a knot of purple ribbons nestling in the little cap that surmounted her soft, wavy white hair, she impressed the bishop, as she did every one else, with the dignity of her aspect and the sweet courtesy of her manners.

Ol' Miss has done but one inexplicable thing in all her life—inexplicable to the neighbors, that is—but the Recording Angel noted the deed with a smile, and she never regretted the act herself. It was when the war broke out, and she heard that Gus Richardson had gone to the army, and she knew that old Mrs. Richardson was left on the plantation alone. People said that it made no difference to her whether Gus was at home or not. She was quite daft; had been ever since that unfortunate affair of Walter Richardson's, her oldest son. Very few people knew the truth of Walter Richardson's sad ending. Ol' Miss was one of the few, and that was the reason why she went over to the Richardson place and brought the old lady to Magnolia Hall, and dismissed the acidulous maiden cousin whom Gus had hired to look after his mother. It was a bold experiment, so bold that a woman less stout of heart or pure of purpose than ol' Miss would have hesitated long before making it. People said the daft old lady sometimes grew communicative, and prattled childishly about Walter and his affair. That was the reason ol' Miss thought best to keep her somewhat excluded from her own household, while looking after her with the tender solicitude of a daughter. There was feeling almost akin to remorse in her tender heart for Walter Richardson's mother; and yet why? Was she really the wicked woman that this daft mother was so fond of talking to her about, clutching her sleeve to detain her by her side while she wandered far back into the past, to the days when "Walter came back from college, so strong and so straight, and so handsome, my dear; and such a good son as he was,

too, and such a happy mother as I—nowhere, nowhere. That was before he fell in love with that Marianne Holmes, who set all the men by the ears. My dear, I never saw her. I think I could kill her if I did, for she wasn't satisfied till she got my Walter in her toils, too, my dear—got his great warm heart to beating for her alone, until he forgot every thing else—me, his business, his ambitions, and then, when she'd made a fool of him, she laughed at him, and married another man ; and then Walter, my Walter, that came home to me so strong and so straight and true, went to the bad—to the bad—to the bad—all for a girl's false face—and he drank, oh, how he drank—and then—hist—don't whisper it, my dear ; somebody said he shot at a man through a window, the man he hated so badly, just because he had married that false-hearted girl. He didn't kill him—but he didn't wait to find that out—he—hush—he came home and shot himself—up there in the blue-room. I hear him moaning there yet—moaning for her—the false-hearted girl who made a wreck of him—my Walter—my handsome Walter. Put your ear close and I'll whisper her name. It was—Marianne Holmes." That was the mad mother's version.

Ol' Miss's maiden name was Marianne Holmes, but all that belonged to the period of the first portrait, where the girl with the blue silk girdle about her waist and the red, red rose in her hair looks out upon an untried world with shy interested eyes. She regarded her ministrations upon Walter Richardson's mother in the light of an atonement, and never wearied in them ; but when the long-strained chord snapped at last, and

the end came, it was with a feeling like that of a discharged debtor that ol' Miss severed the last link between her and her dead past.

It was only after the war that they began to call the mistress of Magnolia Hall "ol' Miss," to distinguish her from the bride, her daughter-in-law, in whose favor she frequently talks of abdicating. Ol' Miss reigned before the war. Her sway was gentle but undisputed, and the conditions of her life serene and satisfying. Since that event she has pursued the uneven tenor of her way with a growing sense of bewilderment and perplexity. She finds it impossible to reconstruct her views on the subjects of home rule and domestic economy, and equally impossible to work the brand-new social machinery smoothly on the old principles. There is, to her thinking, a universal creaking and jarring and an awful amount of friction in it all. No one can convince her that time will gradually adjust things on a higher plane than she ever could have devised. "The times are out of joint," "a very important screw loose somewhere," and it is when the creaking and the friction become most apparent that ol' Miss repeats her threat of abdication most violently.

## CHAPTER V.

### POOR MISS MOLLIE.

SHE is the Colonel's daughter, and was of an age to "receive attention" when the war broke out, which makes her seem a veritable antique to the girls who have become young ladies since that time. The older members of the community call her an "old-fashioned girl." Since but one fashion of living, looking, and thinking has held sway over the Colonel's daughter all these years, no one resents the imputation for her. To the younger people she is "poor Miss Mollie," about whom clusters the delightful mystery of a war romance. The more romantic fancy they can detect a nimbus encircling the locks that are growing thin and gray about Miss Mollie's temples. The giddier among them would gladly assume her bitter-sweet memories for the sake of being as "interesting" as Miss Mollie is, in spite of her fading splendor and accumulating years.

The Colonel's daughter is rather indifferent to than ignorant of the fact that she has very little in common with the planter's daughters who have matured since the war, and placidly speaks of herself as belonging to the "old set," but she is very indulgent toward the new set, whose practical activities and reconstructed



notions are immense innovations on the old ways of doing things and perpetually evoke expressions of mild surprise from her. The Colonel himself sometimes says regretfully that he "wishes Mollie could have seen a little more of the world in her young days. If she had that Congers affair would never have taken such a hold upon her heart and imagination." The nimbus which some of the girls locate above poor Miss Mollie's tucking-comb is the outcome of "that Congers affair." She herself is not conscious that the conditions of her early girlhood had any thing undesirable in them. All the planters' daughters lived the same sort of lives ; indeed, there was no other life for them to lead—busy lives, full of placid industries, pure aims, quaint inheritances, and simple happenings ; lives that left plenty of room for the play of the imagination, but never furnished noxious aliment for fancy. And since the changed conditions of every thing about her have in a measure forced Miss Mollie down to a more sordid level, she refers tenderly to those early days as the "good old times." It is on the border line between those good old times and the new ones that the Congers affair" is located, to neither of which does it belong exclusively.

Miss Mollie's horizon, both social and physical, has been circumscribed in the extreme. She counts it as a source of pride that she has lived all her life in one house ; occupying the same room and sleeping in the same spot in that room. It gives her a sense of immutability that is immensely soothing. People who have frittered existence away in several localities just escape the stigma of vagabondage in Miss Mollie's estima-

tion. She marvels to hear girls speak of life on the plantation as lonely. To her the woods that crowd close up about the ragged orange-hedge that defines her father's proprietary lines ; the quaint old garden, where cabbages and azaleas and turnips and violets contend for supremacy with the most democratic equality of privilege ; the hard-beaten path that leads down to the little boat-house that shelters a fleet of battered and leaky skiffs, are all populous with guests who always come at her beck and never weary her. What if the most of them do dwell in the land of shadows ? They are very real to her, and she has certain spots and seasons for holding audiences with each one of them. They never respond to her invitation with formal " regrets."

When she looks out of her bedroom window she sees a triangular section of a lake, which is blue as a sapphire or gray as granite, according to the humor of the sky that smiles or frowns above it. She sees a mulberry tree whose trunk has accumulated many a ring since the time when she used to wait so impatiently for the ripening of the marrowy fruit that had such a fascination for her immature taste. She sees a crape myrtle tree that has been the undisputed dominion of many generations of mocking birds that have waked her up of moon-lit nights with their ecstatic warblings. She was small then, and the room used to be called the " nursery ;" and Mammy, dear old Mammy, slept there with her on a pallet so close to her trundle-bed that if she got frightened in the night all she had to do was to put her hand out in the dark, sure of its being clasped tenderly by another hand,

that was black and horny and faithful. The old trundle-bed stands unmoved now under the stately four-poster that Miss Mollie sleeps in, except on the rare occasion of a child guest ; but whenever it is rolled into view Mammy "materializes," and Miss Mollie goes back through the years to meet her, and looks up again into a face that was never ugly, or wrinkled, or expressionless to her, because it was Mammy's dear old face, and she feels again the hard hands carefully tucking the bed-clothes about her drowsy limbs, and she hears again the beginning of song or story droned out patiently by way of lullaby. She could not give you the "finis" of song or story. She never heard them in those far-away nights, when Mammy hovered about her until her senses were fast locked in slumber.

When the mulberries grow black (she could reach them now from the nursery window, the tree has spread and grown so) she sees two little sticky, besmeared boy faces surreptitiously thrust in at that same window, so that Fred and Al might make sure of Mammy's absence before making a plunge for the washstand that stood in the corner. The boys were afraid of Mammy and Mammy was afraid of the mulberries. She prophesied awful things from the eating of them every year. There was nothing deadlier in her economy of life. She had never heard then of Federal bullets or of Shiloh or Manassas. When the crape myrtle puts on its pink glory now, and the mocking-birds nest in its leafy branches, Miss Mollie peoples the nursery afresh with the boys and with Mammy, and who shall dare say she occupies the old room all alone ?

She never went from home to school. Few planters of means ever sent their daughters to boarding-school, unless, perhaps, to New Orleans for a year's finishing. The family governess was a universal institution and an honored member of the home circle. Fathers and mothers of those times and that locality held that the woman to whom they could be content to intrust the moral and mental training of their children must surely be worthy of the highest consideration from themselves, and as the governess's duties involved the preparation of the boys for college, her acquirements must be varied and solid. In a room up stairs, pierced by a dormer window, a room which has always been superlatively hot in summer and superlatively cold in winter, the dust gathers thick, and rests undisturbed on a high-colored map of the world hung over the long table about which she and "Mademoiselle" and Fred and Al used to gather in school hours. Here, where the ghosts of long-erased sums still gleam chalkily on the little blackboard, that was then her stumbling-block, Miss Mollie holds pleasant communion with a gentle wraith that once inhabited the body of her governess. The long table has come to base uses since she and the boys wrote their copies on it and distributed the ink impartially between the books, its green baize cover, and their own small fingers. The Colonel's wife uses it now to dry her yeast-cakes on, and the old school-room is still the scene of occasional ferment. The blackboard is hung about with bunches of thyme and sage and strings of red peppers, and has ceased to be an instrument of torture. The room under the roof is a sort of general-

utility room now, but Miss Mollie never enters there without a consciousness of spirits entering with her. She was quite certain in those days that Mademoiselle embodied in her own small person all the wisdom of the ages, and she recalls now with infinite tenderness how gently she was led along the path of knowledge, perhaps at a sauntering gait which never stirred her to any emulous zeal; but what of that? Mademoiselle's position became something of a sinecure after she had fitted the boys for college, but she stayed on until the time came for Miss Mollie to have the finishing touches applied in New Orleans; then she passed out of the realm of actualities into that of memories, where she will abide forevermore.

It was an idyllic sort of life the Colonel's daughter led on the plantation after the completion of her school-days, with no exciting breaks in it but an annual trip to New Orleans, when her father went to see his commission merchants, and her mother to do the shopping, which was all condensed into that one excursion. When one's nearest neighbor is five miles off, one naturally becomes self-reliant in the matter of entertainment, and to the Colonel's daughter there could be no possible lack of it, so long as her little mare Fanny was at her command, or there remained unread a single book in the old-fashioned desk case at one end of the big hall, or there was a skiff and a pair of oars to ply among the lily-pads, or her "squab" house harbored its multitude of "fan-tails," "pouters," and "tumblers." Beaux were not among the necessities of life, but were regarded rather in the light of agreeable incidents, and on the rare occasions when a young

man formed one at the family table or slept in the spare chamber up under the roof, it was not without a maidenly flutter in the region of her heart that Miss Mollie would make the furtive addition of a flower or bright ribbon to her toilet, condemning herself the while for a silly creature. But the maidenly flutter was scarcely more than the startled motion of some shy thing unused to intrusion from the outer world, and the Colonel not unfrequently congratulated himself that Mollie was too sensible a girl to drop into any fellow's mouth like an over-ripe cherry.

Then the war came, and the zeal of Miss Mollie's patriotism fairly consumed her. The woolen comforters that she crocheted, the morocco "soldiers' companions" that she contrived, the fearfully and wonderfully knit socks she was responsible for, the shapeless shirts that she made out of her mother's parlor brocattelle curtains were beyond computation. Her ideas on states' rights and the question of secession may have been slightly befogged, but she was quite clear on the question of her own duty in the premises, and that was to uphold with might and main and needle the side that her father and Fred and Al had espoused. The preparations for war seemed rather an august display of dignity at first, and she was quite sure nothing could be more becoming to a man than the Confederate gray uniform. She really prided herself on the possession of two brothers so well qualified to set it off, and was consumed with regret that she herself was nothing but a useless female. Her patriotism rose to white heat when the Delancy Battery, fresh from New Orleans, encamped in the neighborhood,

and the atmosphere was permeated with uniforms and canteens. If she had ever entertained any doubt of the "sanctity of the cause" her father and brothers had espoused, every doubt vanished forever when she was first brought into close personal contact with the First Lieutenant of the Delancy Battery, whom her father brought home in his buggy from the camp one day quite ill. Those who knew best said that Lieutenant Congers had indulged recklessly in green muscadines, but the halo of romance the Colonel's daughter promptly cast about the pallid-faced young soldier forbade any such gross conclusions, and no wounded crusader was ever nursed back to health and happiness with tenderer assiduity than was this sick Lieutenant by the Colonel's daughter. Ah! the happy hours of his convalescence. Oh! the revelations of the sweetness life may hold! And now, when the Colonel's daughter saunters through the pasture when the wild Cherokee roses are in bloom, or catches the delicate fragrance of the sweet-gum afloat in the air, she is not companionless, for there walks by her side a something that has yet the power to stir her pulses to quicker vibration, and it is then that the nimbus glows brightest.

The Delancy Battery was called to the front after awhile and its Lieutenant marched away with it, looking very handsome and very happy. Wonderful stories came back, perhaps true, perhaps not, but there was no room for doubt in her soul. It was then that she developed into a great newspaper reader. Not that there were many newspapers to read, but occasionally a copy of one printed on wall-paper, or a flimsy specimen of Confederate manufacture, fur-

nished meager details of the doings of the army, and if by chance the name of the Delancy Battery figured in it, then it was very sure to find its way into a certain box in Miss Mollie's top bureau drawer that already contained a Confederate button with the Louisiana pelican on it, a torn scrap of gold lace, and a little pencil sketch of herself the Lieutenant had made one evening when she had rowed him aimlessly about among the lily pads. But long lapses of death-like silence would intervene when every thing in life was left to conjecture, when not a crumb of comfort was available from any quarter. It was then that the Colonel's daughter would fling herself fiercely into the work of weaving for the soldiers, knitting for them, and praying for them. The neighbors seemed to come closer together in those days, and every body knew that poor Miss Mollie was in a state of chronic anxiety about the Lieutenant, and every body shared her anxiety in a qualified degree. Conventional secretiveness and society subterfuges concerning "engagements" counted for nothing in those serious days.

Then a day came when Miss Mollie herself, flitting from one plantation to the other on the back of her little mare Fanny, told all the girls they must help her to make out a trousseau, as her own wardrobe was reduced to a pair of Indian moccasins that had been sent her from Saratoga before the war, and had ornamented the parlor *étagère* until the exigencies of war times compelled Miss Mollie to wear them, and a basque made of bedticking and ornamented with black braid. Fancy a wedding trousseau manufactured with shops and milliners left out! Such an



overhauling of trunks as was never seen before, such donations of silk stockings and quaint old brocades that had been laid away in rose leaves long before Miss Mollie had come into the world, such a resurrection of kid gloves that had been rolled up in blue starch paper to keep them from spotting, until the days of parties and entertainments should come again. What if the dresses were of antique make and obsolete pattern? they were for her wedding outfit, and love made good all deficiencies.

The day and the hour came; the Lieutenant did not. There was no telegraphing backward and forward in those days, no lifting of loads of anxiety on the pin point of an electric machine; there was not even a slower-moving letter to tell Miss Mollie that her lover was keeping faith with her, but could not keep tryst. Only an awful silence, a dreary looking for that which never came, a settling into blank despair, which came finally as absolute relief from convulsions of hope and fear; and then Miss Mollie took up the old life as well as she could, in hands that had grown heavy and listless. The gathered trousseau was locked away in two great trunks, and the first girl that was married at the close of the war was the recipient. Nothing direct ever came from the Lieutenant. Theories and rumors concerning the affair were numerous and varied. No one was ever able to discover which one of them Miss Mollie herself inclined to. She seemed to have condensed all the romance of her life into that "Congers affair," and no one has ever essayed to stand in the position of acknowledged lover to Miss Mollie since then.

She never moped visibly or railed at the other sex, after the fashion of disappointed women generally. Her interest in Confederate newspapers continued unabated up to the day of Lee's surrender. She frequently amuses visitors of the younger generation now by showing them her collection of Confederate souvenirs. There is the Confederate button that she wore on her left shoulder, to fasten the ribbon streamers there, on the day that she stood on the courthouse steps with a lot of other girls, listening to a terrifically long speech made by the strong-minded woman of the parish by way of presenting the flag they had all worked at so fiercely to finish before the Redtown Rifles left for the seat of war. The sun had blazed down upon their bare heads on that occasion mercilessly, but the inward fires of patriotism had blazed with a nullifying ardor, and she had nothing but pleasant memories associated with that brass button. There was a lot of federal note-paper captured at Shiloh, grown yellow now with age, at the left-hand corner of which were vignettes with all manner of blood-thirsty sentiments and threats of annihilation for the other side. They are very funny now. There is a small fortune in Confederate bills, ranging from delicate pink fractional currency up to the bluish-gray twenty-dollar notes, whose only value now lies in the fact of their being curious mementoes; there are samples of cloth woven by Miss Mollie's own hands on the little clumsy plantation loom that has long since been cut up for fire-wood, and there is a lock of General Lee's hair, and his name on a blank sheet of paper, which he generously forwarded her in response to a

prettily worded petition for them. Miss Mollie rarely opens the envelope that contains these sacred mementoes without giving her listeners a graphic description of the day when the news of Lee's surrender fell upon their stunned ears. She will go back freely and volubly to the beginning of the war, but always skips the Delancy Battery.

She knows only theoretically of a busier, more tempestuous, more eventful life than her own. She can entertain her father's guests by meeting them intelligently in discussion of American or European politics or the state of the crops, as their own mental trend may suggest. She can entertain her mother's guests with an equally intelligent discussion of the respective claims of "Plymouth Rocks" over "Brahmas." But her own special industry is floriculture. The names of Peter Henderson and Henry Vick mean more to her than any politician's at Washington. She is constantly getting packages of cuttings and bulbs and new varieties of annuals. She has become quite an authority on roses, and the Neapolitan violets that grow in thick masses in the border beds of the vegetable garden excel any ever grown in the forests for sweetness and vigor. She reads the Northern papers as industriously as she used to read Confederate papers. She knows that woman has taken a tremendous stride to the front in these latter days, and when she reads of them as doctors and lawyers and lecturers and advanced thinkers and talkers, it is with a sort of pitying horror, for, of course they must be horrid to look at or to come in contact with. She marvels at them, but does not envy them.

She rarely projects a plan very far into the future, never further than the end of the year; then, if the crop turns out well (every thing is predicated on that), she will ask father to fence her in a new flower-garden or buy her a new saddle. She is still a child to the Colonel and his wife, and as the conditions of her life grow more fixed every year, she will never be any thing else. She has never outlined a mission for herself, even in the wildest flights of her imagination. Her attitude toward the future is simply one of waiting. If her life has been aimless, it has also been spotless, and when the planter's daughter finally goes the way of all flesh, let some one inscribe for her epitaph: "Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MAYO BOYS.

PEOPLE prophesied all manner of adverse things when it was known throughout Horseshoe Bend that old Judge Mayo (who lived in splendid style at his town place, up behind the Mississippi Bluffs, on the revenues drawn from the two swamp plantations over in Louisiana) had concluded to put his two boys on the two contiguous places and give them "full swing." Full swing had such an excessively liberal sound, and plantation life offered such immense scope for all sorts of swings, that it quite curdled the blood in the veins of two dear old maiden ladies, living out at "the landing," to think of those two Mayo boys coming straight from Harvard and settling down on the plantations as their own masters. "Absolutely no restraint, you know, and with hired overseers and a lot of obsequious slaves to look up to them and make them think they were little tin gods on wheels."

The Mayo boys were aware of their ultimate destination before leaving home for a four years' course at Harvard. The Judge had thought it best to be open with them, otherwise they might be planning careers for themselves when they got off with a lot of restless young fellows at the North, and as he was getting old,

he would like to see for himself, before he died, what sort of planters the boys would make. He felt pretty sure of Rafe, but Benny caused him many an anxious thought. Not that the boys had displayed any especial hankering after independent careers. In fact, it was rather pleasant than otherwise, when the fellows of their mess would be discussing plans for the making of future livelihoods with a greater or less degree of anxiety, for them to descant, unboastfully, upon the ready-made establishments that were waiting their occupancy in the far-away swamps of Louisiana. This absence of anxiety on the "living" question did not tend to mental or physical inactivity on the part of the Mayo boys. The spur of ambition is just as keen, oftentimes, as the spur of necessity, and when they finally turned their steps Southward, with their diplomas in their trunks, the mess mourned the departure of its first-honor man in Rafe, and the boat-club lost its champion stroke-oar in Benny.

With a large sense of independence and a small sense of responsibility, the Judge's sons entered upon the practical duties of life as planters in their own names. From a practical point of view it is hard to determine what immediate bearing a collegiate course had upon the duties of a planter. It was not, however, as if they were to have the direct personal supervision of matters, as in the case of Northern farmers. The overseer was for that ; but the financial and executive ability to control the expenditure of a large plantation and maintain a general supervision of the welfare of several hundred souls must abide in the planter himself.

A spirit of pleasant emulation sprang up between the two plantations that were divided from each other simply by a strip of woodland that they held in common as pasture. Rafe, as the oldest son in the family, occupied what had been the family residence before the Judge and the Judge's daughters had outgrown the plantation. It was quite a spacious mansion compared with Benny's four-room cottage, but the instincts of primogeniture were strong enough to make it seem all right to the younger son. Benny was ahead on the housekeeper question, for the Mammy who had rocked them both to sleep in the days of their infancy was at the head of his *ménage* while Rafe had to satisfy himself with the wife of his head teamster, whose light bread and spiced beef and hogshead cheese could never stand comparison with Mammy's. After the Judge had seen both the boys established in their own houses, had selected good overseers for each, and had crowned his paternal efforts for their success in life by giving each a buggy and a pair of horses, he considered he had done all he was called on to do, and formally emancipated them from leading-strings by informing them that he expected them to use their own judgment in the conduct of their own affairs, only referring to him in cases of special emergency. "It was the only way to make men of them," the Judge declared in subsequent confidence to his wife.

The world looked a spacious playground to the Judge's sons. What if their own particular corner of it was a trifle barren of interest or excitement? There was always the possibility of escape on numerous lit-

tle "business trips" to New Orleans, which were pretty sure to occur about the time of the fall or spring races; a few weeks at the White Sulphur or Old Point Comfort during the heat of summer, and the constant solace of a lot of fellows up from the city during the fishing or the snipe season. Not that they were going to give themselves over to the pursuit of pleasure. Indeed, no; they were going to "lay over" the older and slower-moving planters so far with their improved machinery, and their imported stock and what not, that Clifton, Rafe's place, and Hardscrabble, Benny's, should be regarded as the model places of the parish. There was an immense sensation involved in these first experimental days. Innovation by youth is always regarded as a species of impertinence by experienced old age. The Judge's boys had brought home a lot of new-fangled notions from the North that wouldn't "go down" in their own neighborhood without strenuous opposition. What use did a nigger have for a buggy-plow? or who wanted his mules and horses stabbed to death on barbed-wire fences? The Judge's old brindle bull had been good enough, who approved of the putting of as much money into one head of stock as those boys had flung away on that imported short-horn? "Too much Greek and Latin and too little common-sense over at Clifton and Hardscrabble." The buggy-plow never did "go down." It finally found rest under a big pecan tree in Rafe's front yard, and never served any nobler purpose than as a plaything for a lot of shining-cheeked little darkeys, who would scamper away incontinently at the sight of Mars' Rafe's horse turn-



ing in at the big gate, or for a roost at night for truant chickens who abhorred the restraint of the padlocked henhouse and absented themselves regularly until after locking-up time.

The rivalry between the two plantations and the brothers was a thing that permeated every department of each place, and invaded every spot but their own hearts. There they were at one, and a word or an imputation cast upon either was as fiercely and hotly resented as if self alone had been attacked. If Rafe's mule-team appeared at the landing one week with six mules and twenty bales of cotton, Ben's would appear the next with eight mules and thirty bales. If the Hardscrabble steam press turned out bales weighing 550 pounds, the Clifton engineer would run the risk of "blowing up the whole concern" but what his bales should tip the beam at 600. The race as to which place should exhibit the first "bloom," or send the first bale of cotton from the parish, or get the crop out longest before Christmas, was prolific of good results to both places, and served to render the first years of life on the plantation more endurable to two boys whose active young brains and strong young bodies bounded with all the vigor and ambition of early manhood.

The industrial emulation that had divided the whole neighborhood into partisans worked differently on the differing organizations of the two Mayo boys in the long-run. The Judge had made the error, so common with parents, of prescribing the same regimen for entirely different constitutions. The spirit of enterprise that had been conceived in jocularly, entered in and

took possession of Rafe Mayo's entire being. People began to say there was a "good deal of come-out in the boy." His buggy and horses were seen less often waiting for him at the steamboat landing. He himself was seen less often whittling a bench on Gravesend's store gallery while he waited for the mail packet to land, so that he could get a Memphis or New Orleans paper. Bachelor parties out at Clifton, during the partridge or the fishing season, were heard of less often. When Rafe did ride into town it would be on a horse saddled with a plain McClellan tree, instead of the fancy English saddle, with its stamped-leather "splashes" he had sported so jauntily at first, and instead of the buttoned shoes that had excited such unfavorable comment from the store-gallery critics, his trowsers-legs were stuffed into the tops of an honest pair of mud boots. And when finally a colored percale shirt-bosom was discovered between his cravat and waist-coat, there could no longer be a doubt that Rafe Mayo was settling down to business and was going to prove a credit to his family and to the parish. His name soon began to be mentioned exclusively in connection with short-horns and Berkshires and South-downs, and the dust gathered thicker and thicker on the books on the shelves he had filled with such pride at his installation. Rafe's new departure was immensely funny in Ben's eyes. Of course, it couldn't last. But he wasn't going to turn mole too, because Rafe had. The Mayos always had been high-livers and had kept an open-house. Somebody would have to sustain the credit of the family name. What was to hinder? The total absence of female influence in his

home was one more barrier removed. Not that there were not within three or four miles of him women of the loveliest mental and physical type, but three or four miles is a long distance when the whole distance is one long stretch of bottomless mud ; and his mother and sisters were over there at the town place, glad enough always to see him and Rafe, but not dependent on them in any respect for comfort and happiness. Well if they had been. Well for the affluent young slave-owner, with his large independence and limitless authority, if something or some one had been absolutely dependent upon him for comfort and support. Well for him if some nobler outlet than Berkshire pigs or Southdown sheep had been at hand for his virile energy and teeming fancy to expend themselves upon. People began to say, "The wild streak in the Mayo blood was coming out in Ben." His horses and buggy were seen far oftener waiting for him at the steam-boat landing. He himself was seen oftener than ever whittling a bench on Gravesend's store gallery, while he waited for the mail-packet to land, so he could run aboard and get one of those inimitable sherry cobbles that were procurable only at its bar. Why not ? There was nothing to do when he went back home but to eat dinner by himself, smoke a lonely cigar, or ride over to Rafe's. He couldn't always procure fellows to help him kill time, and as for Rafe, well, he'd taken to preaching of late, and that was the last feather. He would *not* be preached at. Perhaps if he had seen any signs of deterioration of his property, it might have served as a wholesome check, but there was none; his overseer's interest in affairs was too well-grounded

for that. People said : " It was a pity. Ben Mayo was such a noble fellow, so absolutely incapable of a meanness or a lie. Apt to go off at half-cock, but as quick to apologize for a mistake as to resent an injury." Rafe confessed, confidentially to his father, that he feared Ben was getting into a snarl with his commission merchants, but the Judge was a Brutus-like personage, who preferred letting his son sow and reap his crop of wild oats without let or hindrance from him.

It was when the secession excitement was at white heat, and the spirit of recklessness pervaded the air, that Ben made his last trip to New Orleans. He was a well-known and always a welcome figure on the deck or in the great brilliant saloon where, when the supper tables had been cleared away and the colored cloths were put back on the round tables, cards were in order. The ladies, far back in the luxurious cabin over the stern, might see four heads clustered about a table, but no sound or exclamation floated to them to shock or anger their sense of the proprieties. Nothing but gentlemen-players playing for recreation, as the boat made her deliberate way from landing to landing, picking up a bale of cotton here, a passenger there, a sack or two of seed in another place, leaving her living freight to beguile itself as best it might for three or four days and nights.

No one ever knew just exactly what happened at the card-table. Ben Mayo made one at it on that trip, but the spirit of recklessness that pervaded the air must have been in his breast to excess, for he was losing, and as the code forbids any man to draw out of the

game while he is winning, unless by consent of the loser, he played on and on until every man had dropped away from the table, excepting the one who could not stop and the one who would not ; on and on until the lamps in the long cabin had all been turned down to the lowest notch save those immediately over his table ; on and on until the spectators dropped away yawning to their stateroom, and there was no one left in sight but a sleepy officer nodding over the big stove at one end of the social hall, and a cabin-boy, alert for orders from the players, who were oblivious of every thing but the mad stake they were playing for. The end came at last. There was no sound to indicate it to the sleepy officer by the stove or to the cabin-boy alert for fees. Only a gleam of triumph in one pair of eyes—only a sort of spasmodic contraction about Ben Mayo's lips. Then he got up, very white in the face but firm of step, went to the clerk's office, wrote a few lines, came back to the table, handed it to his opponent with a silent bow, and went off to his stateroom to sleep off, temporarily, the reflection that Hardscrabble was no longer his property, nor had he any more right in any of its appurtenances. It was a trifle hard to be cabined with the new owner of Hardscrabble for another day and night ; but the river was low, and the boat was slow, and—fortunately—they were both gentlemen, so no one on board was any the wiser for the transaction. If Ben Mayo suffered for his recklessness, he was plucky enough to hide it admirably, and, indeed, spent more time than usual the next day back in the ladies' cabin, where his opponent's wife and daughters were.

It wasn't easy to tell Rafe about it when he went back home. But he did it without flinching, and to Rafe's natural question, "What are you going to do?" he simply answered, "I don't know; give me time to pull myself together." It wasn't easy to tell his people that they all belonged to another man and were to pass from under his good-natured sway into untried hands. There were a lot of the family hands on his place, and he knew "they'd howl" at the idea of calling any body but a Mayo master. He didn't intend to try to tell the Judge until he had pulled himself together. He'd been an awful fool, and there was no getting around that. He didn't try to exculpate himself.

Just then the thunder of Sumter's guns reverberated throughout the land, and the demand for volunteers was hailed by one of the Mayo boys with a sense of relief. Now he knew what he was going to do. At last he could answer Rafe's question. He went out as a private in the first company that left the parish, and left the telling of his reckless play to Rafe. Went with an outfit slightly incongruous with his position as a private in a company of infantry, taking with him Bob, who had been his body-servant since the day of his return from Harvard, and who had been excepted from the calamity that overtook the rest of his people. It never occurred to Bob that Mars' Ben's silver boot-hooks and suspender buckles would be slightly out of place in camp; nor that his splendid hookah had better be left behind; in consequence of all which Bob ignorantly secured for his beloved master the soubriquet of Fancy Mayo. No one ever called him so when

he could hear it, for there was a dangerous gleam in Private Mayo's eyes that precluded trifling. How he lived down the sneers his silver boot-hooks and other costly accessories involved him in, how he came to be spoken of as "one of the noblest fellows that ever lived," how he made his mark the first time Company C went into action, used to be told with many variations about many camp-fires. But Bob's story, as he told it simply and tearfully when he went back home alone, is the accepted one in the Mayo family. Bob shall tell it this once more :

"He needn't a-died at all, Mars' Benny needn't, but it was a choice 'twix' him and de odder one. Our folks was runnin'. Dey was 'bleege' t'run. Dey b'en fightin' and fallin' back all day. Dey was jis' nat'rally gin out. I hed catch a calv'ry horse and brung him to whar' Mars' Benny wuz tryin' to help a wounded soldier on to his feet. He were one uv our men, but he did'n' even b'long to our company. I sez, sorter hurried like, 'Git in de saddle, Mars' Benny, and we kin bofe git away. I'll ride behin' you.' Stidder that, he look at me sorter commandin' lak an' say, 'Bob, help me to put this man in the saddle, and you hold him on the horse and gallop for dear life.' 'But how 'bout you?' I sez. He jes' roar at me—'Do what I tell you!' an' I done it. The hurt soldier was swooned an' did'n' know who was handlin' him. I heard Mars' Benny say under his bref lak, 'He's got a wife and daughter to mourn for him—I have not.' I galloped away wid dat strange man in front o' me, but my heart was achin' for Mars' Benny. I went back nex' day an' foun' him. He looked mighty white an' peaceful

like as if he heerd de angels whisperin' t' him, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,' but he never open his han'sum eyes no more."

The man whom Benny Mayo had put on the horse in front of Bob was the new owner of Hardscrabble. The deed to the place had not been made out legally before the war put a stop to all business, and his death would have absolved Ben from his debt of honor. But it was not in him to seek escape by such quibbling with life or death. He had his own code. He lived and died by it. If every man really is the result of the sum of his ancestors, plus his own environment, who shall say the result in Ben Mayo's case was—0?



## CHAPTER VII.

### UNCLE LIGE.

**I**F it is true that in the beginning of his career Uncle Lige had greatness of a superficial sort thrust upon him, it is no less true that in later years he achieved it in that solid form which comes from the unconscious exercise of heroism under circumstances calculated to try the mettle of men of far higher mental and moral culture than he could ever claim.

In these later years, if it should be put to the vote which could best be dispensed with on the Caruthers place, one of the many brick pillars on which the "big house" is supported, as on stilts, or Uncle Lige, who is, in his way, a very important support too, it would perhaps result in a tie. In point of seniority he antedates every member of the white family with whose fortunes his own are inextricably mixed up. He is emphatically "the old man" to them, and they are one and all "children" to him. The tie that binds them together is founded in mutual respect and affection. They have a community of interest in the present, and the pleasant as well as sorrowful memories of the past they hold in common; whatever of good may be hidden in the future it is safe to predict will be shared impartially. Neither side would willingly have it otherwise.

The date of Uncle Lige's birth is lost in the fogs of remote ages. Even the exigent questioning of the census-taker has never extracted any thing more definite from him than that he "was here w'en de stars fell." This system of chronology is simple and original. The earlier events of his life all occurred either before or after the year the stars fell; later ones, before or after General Jackson died. Whosoever insists upon greater accuracy on Uncle Lige's part is set down by him as being "onreasonable an' exactin'." His stock of superstitions is large and indestructible, and as long as he remains the autocrat he is on the Caruthers place, no cattle will ever be branded on the wane of the moon, or any potatoes be planted on its increase, and Friday will never witness the beginning of an undertaking.

Uncle Lige's immediate connection with the white family dates from the day of his accidental promotion from the position of head teamster on the plantation to that of family coachman, the most dignified position attainable by any body in his sphere of life. He never wearies of detailing the circumstances of his promotion, and his sense of morality is nowise shocked that his own rise was in consequence of a fellow-mortal's fall. If any casuist draws his attention to this point, Uncle Lige dismisses it with an airy declaration that "ev'y tub mus' stan' on its own bott'm." The story of his transplanting from the quarters to be "yard folks" he tells with a chuckling prelude that never failed to arouse "French John" (his supplanted rival) to the highest pitch of frenzy. Since death has closed French John's ears, and terminated a long and

rancorous feud between him and Uncle Lige, the old man tells the story less often and with less gusto. There are still some of the "chillun" young enough to extract amusement from the oft-told tale, the more especially as it deals with the mystical period when the grandfather, who is only a memory and a portrait now, and the grandmother, who is a delicate, fading reality, were young and romantic. How queer to associate the idea of youth and romance with that slight, feeble form, those faded, sunken eyes, and the delicate, blue-veined temples, about which two pretty little curls of snow-white hair droop, all of which go to make up "Grandma" !

Uncle Lige craves one more hearing :

"H'it all hap'n befo' Genul Jacksin die. It was 'bout de time dat Mars' John 'clude it wor'n' good fur man t' be 'lone, en 'clude to 'bey de Scripture 'juncshun, en' go down de coas' to fetch him up a wife. But befo' he wen' he sot he's house in order, so to speak. He'd ben livin' to heseff in de log cabin his pa put up w'en he fus' cl'ared de place, but no wife er his'n wor'n gwine to be put down in dat little low-roof log-house 'hind de cotton-wood trees ; so Mars' John, he sends all de way to Cincinnater fur de framework uv dis big house, en sech a sawin' en hammerin', en gardenin', en puttin' up uv hen-houses, en layin' down of brick walks, en pickin' out of yard folks from de fiel' han's ! But Lige wor'n 'mongst 'em, no, sirs. Lige hed to stan' off en' look at h'it all wid his finger in he's mouf. Den de crownin' glory come, in a new ker-ridge en' p'ar from Orleens. I ain' gwine tell no lie 'bout it, dis nigger's fingers did fa'rly itch t' git hol' uv

dem spankin' bob-tail mar's. But Mars' John didn' have no use for a flat-nose, pock-mark, squatty nigger lak me, *den*. I wuz good 'nough to drive he's mule team t' de landin', arter a load er freight, or t' haul his cott'n crop t' town, but not t' set up on dat kerridge-box en drive he's wife. No, sirs. He done bought a driver same time he bought de kerridge en' de mar's. A gemmun ob color he wuz, he wor'n' no nigger. A black monkey I called him, wi' his ha'r smellin' of grease, en his dandy ways, en all dat. En' I larfe to myself to think er dat boy tryin' to manage dem skittish bob-tails, as dey prance over de bridges and crost de bayers en froo dese woods er oun. Well, sirs, de day done come w'en Mars' John was t' git home wid he's new wife. French John had he's orders to be at de landin' wid de horses en kerridge, en' I hed mine to be dar wid de mule-team to fotch out de baggidge. Well, sirs, we wuz dar, French John wid de new kerridge en me wid de fo'-mule wagin. I tuk Sam Baker 'long t' help wid de trunks. De boat was late. Boats mos' generally is late w'en you's waitin' fur 'em. Mr. Creole Nigger he strut 'bout dar showin' off in Mars' John's las' winter overcoat en a new hat, a crackin' uv his bran' new kerridge whip lak Fofe uv July firecrackers at fus', but come presen'ly, I sees Mr. Creo' slippin' crost de levee to Mack Williams's sto'. I sez to myseff, go it, nigger ; ef you knowed es much 'bout Mack Williams's whisky as dis nigger does, you'd be mighty shy of techin' it w'en you got t' drive w'ite folks home in de dark wid de mud 'bout axle deep. But it wor'n none er my lookout. I wor'n' put dar t' keep French John straight, and I allers were

principled 'gainst meddlin' wid w'at wor'n none er my biziness. 'My brudder!' En I should a ben he's keeper! No, sirs; French John wor'n none er my brudder. I didn' come from no sech stock, *I* tell you. Well, de long en de short of it wuz, de boat done come finally, en I see Mars' John a steppin' crost de gang-plank wid he's head high up in de a'r, en a hangin' to he's arm de purties' sort uv a lady (I tell you ol' Miss were a stunner in her young days), en' French John, yere he come, jus' a cavortin' crost de levee mekin' dem skittish mar's jump ev'y foot uv de way t' de chune of dat crackin' whip. Mars' John he gin 'im one black look, den he call out, sorter loud like, 'Is Lige Rankin here?' Lige were thar sho'es you is bo'n; en' he say, 'Git up on dat box en tak dem reins.' Lige didn' need no secon' axin'. I was dar, en' I hed dem reins in my hands fo' Mr. Creo' knew wa't hu't him. French John he went home layin' in a heap on top a bale er baggin' in de fo' mule wagin. En Lige Rankin, well, he done hol' dem reins frum dat day to dis. But w'at de use er goin' so fur back? All dat happin' fo' Genul Jacksin die."

The carriage that brought the bride home on that memorable occasion is a wreck and a relic now. It has stood motionless in one corner of the carriage-house while the dust of years accumulated on its cracked and wrinkled curtains. It is the favorite retreat of an ancient Dominick hen, who lays her eggs under the back seat and broods over them periodically in peaceful immunity from fresh-egg fiends; but it is a sacred relic in Uncle Lige's estimation, and no vehicle will ever be just the same to him. The bride he brought

home in triumph then sits in the easiest chair in the warmest nook by the fireside in winter, or the shadiest spot on the gallery in the summer, and the young men and maidens of the household do reverence to her years and her virtues. To Uncle Lige she is something only a little lower than the angels, for to her gentle sway he owes the many additional accomplishments that became his after he was enrolled among the yard-folks.

Ol' Miss was the making of him, he candidly admits. As the Caruthers place, with its isolation from its neighbors and its environment of mud, did not offer temptations for the idle luxury of a daily drive, the carriage and horses were kept as conveyances, and in the long intervals of their appearance at the front door, up to which Uncle Lige delighted in driving with as broad a sweep as the front yard would permit of, his duties apart from driving were well defined and numerous. The large garden, where vegetables and flowers flourished amicably side by side, was his to work by day and to guard by night. Set into one side of the tall picket-fence was a tiny cabin of one room and a lean-to that goes by the name of the gardener's house. Within, its walls are hung thick with bags of seeds of the watermelons, cantaloupes, lima beans, and innumerable other esculents of his own preservation, for Uncle Lige has slight faith in "sto' seed." The whitewashed joists are gay with strings of red pepper, garlands of okra pods, and the bright yellow balsam apple, whose curative qualities when steeped in whisky are sure and far-famed. Many a quart of whisky finds its way into Uncle

Lige's locker, brought hither by the recipient of cut or burn or bruise, who craves the balsam of which Uncle Lige always has good store in exchange for the fiery liquid the old man craves. The shed in front of the gardener's house is wreathed about with a rich climbing rose that would grace a palace, but it is a thing of small account in the old man's eyes. Ol' Miss, in his estimation, wastes much good ground and time, too, in the cultivation of her roses, and jessamines, and violets, and lady slippers, and dahlias, and tuberoses. It had much better be put in pindars or rutabagas ; but, though neither the beauty nor the sweetness of the flowers appeals to any of his senses, it is her wish to have them, and it would go hard with Lige before they should suffer neglect at his hands. Seen by the moonlight, or yet more vaguely by the glimmer of the distant stars, the long spacious garden over which Uncle Lige reigns supreme is a peaceful and pretty object, with its neat squares of erect cabbages, bordered with bright-hued zinnias, its feathery-topped carrot bed, tipped at the edges with glowing gladioli, its green tangled masses of watermelon vines, hiding not only the dark glossy fruit so dear to the universal palate, but deadly spring guns which Uncle Lige has placed judiciously and so arranged by a system of telegraphic strings running into his cabin floor that the soundest sleep he is capable of falling into will be shattered at the first marauding footfall. None of the white family lay any claim to the garden or its fruitage. It is emphatically Uncle Lige's garden, and visitors to the big house must always pay it their meed of admiration under his personal super-

vision. He is conscious that it stands unrivaled in all the country-side, and is not averse to being told so over and over again. Of rainy days the children used to love to scamper from the big house across the wet garden, where the rain-laden jessamines flung their heavy perfume on the air, to Uncle Lige's cabin to "watch him." He was never known to be idle. There was the grindstone under the rose-wreathed shed that some of them might turn while he sharpened his ax, or there was harness-mending going on, or the bright speckled beans to be separated each after its kind, or the hoes to be filed to a fine edge, or the rake to be retoothing, or greatest fun of all, a lesson to be taught Uncle Lige.

Of all the "chillun" who were dear to his heart there was one dearer than all. She is a woman now, a tall, stately, serious woman, one who has known grief; but in those peaceful days long before the war, when the tie between the big house and Uncle Lige's cabin seemed wrought of conditions that could never know change nor weakening, she was a blue-eyed, yellow-haired child, who used to ride over to the Denny place to school every morning behind Uncle Lige on his "calico" pony "Slouch." She can remember to this day how ridgy Slouch's back was in spite of an immense amount of padding, and how completely the familiar landscape was blotted from view by Uncle Lige's broad back and her own protruding sun-bonnet; but he was the most indulgent of carriers, and many a stoppage would be made between home and the Denny place, when she would be left trembling alone in awful isolation on Slouch's back, while Uncle Lige



dismounted to gather an armful of the sweet-smelling creamy lace tufts of elder-blossom, or a bunch of pale blue-bells from the side of the levee, or the first glossy dewberries that gleamed ripely from under their bridal wreaths of blossoms. That was after the boys went away to school, and she was too tiny to have a governess all to herself. And then, when they rode back through the fields at dinner-time, how conscientiously she gave her faithful carrier at second-hand all the lore she had accumulated through the morning hours. It was she who of rainy days, perched in the best chair in Uncle Lige's cabin, with her "McGuffey" stretched open in her lap to bring it on a level with the old man's wrinkled face, as he sat humbly on the lintel of his own door, with his huge feet resting on the cypress block that answered him for a doorstep, tried so very hard to teach him how to read for himself, and fastened her big blue eyes on him with such despairing pity when he finally closed the book himself in absolute resignation of the effort, with the pathetic declaration : "'Tain't no use, honey. It's hard teachin' ol' dogs new tricks. I'se a ol' dog, en book l'arnin's a mouty hard trick. You jes' read a story oncet-a-w'ile to de ol' man, en I reckon dat'll be 'bout all he kin tek in." And so it had ended ; and what if he did oftener than not fall asleep just as she got to the most exciting part of the story ? He was tired, and sitting still had a soporific effect upon him. So she would close the book softly, and sit looking out at the great raindrops standing on the thick cabbage leaves, or weighting down the crimson salvias, waiting for the old man to start apologetically from his "forty

winks," and carry her back across the drenched garden to the big house, perched aloft on his honest shoulders.

It was to Uncle Lige the boys came for instruction in rowing, and riding, and gunning. It was he who taught them the rhythm of the oars and the dexterous art of "feathering" that sent the clear water of the lake rippling away in fairy rings from the shining blades; it was he who "broke" their ponies for them and plodded patiently at their heads until they grew ashamed of his protection; it was the prowess of his gun that kept the family table supplied with ducks, and snipe, and partridges, and made the boys his eager pupils and his envious admirers. But the day came when the boys rode away from the big house, leaving behind them their ponies, with other childish things; when the yellow curls and the blue eyes of the child who tried in vain to inoculate him with buds from the tree of knowledge, were seen less seldom in the cabin in the garden; for days of anxious watching and tumultuous effort had come to the women of the land, who had sent away from them all who were strong enough of heart and hand to do a patriot's part. It was then that Uncle Lige's executive ability and loyal affection for his "wite folks" had full and vigorous play.

"Take care of your mistress and my daughter, old man," the master had said, wringing old Lige's hand, as he too, when the fight waxed hotter and thicker, went off to the front. How proudly the old man's heart swelled within him when the mistress, whom he regarded only as a trifle lower than the angels, turned

to him for advice at almost every juncture. How eagerly he spent himself that the comforts his "w'ite folks" were accustomed to should not fail them through any mismanagement or neglect on his part. And when grim gunboats began to sentinel the river, putting a period to all communication with the master and the boys, and gradually drawing the cordon still closer, until the necessities of life grew few and hard to procure, it was Uncle Lige, who, loading a skiff with sweet potatoes and pecans, and paddling softly out into the river, under cover of thick darkness, came back with a wondrous supply of tea and coffee that his "w'ite folks" consumed with a guilty sensation of disloyalty, but with a relish born of a nauseous experience of burned okra coffee and sassafras tea.

Uncle Lige was never absent from the yard about the big house during the entire period of his administration but once besides this; then it was for four days and nights. It was a notable journey, and has been embodied among his reminiscent narratives. It was no desertion of the post of duty; it was, on the contrary, the taking on of a graver responsibility for the sake of the "young miss" who ranked next in his affections to the master's wife, "ol' Miss."

The blue eyes he had watched from the cradle were growing faded from excessive weeping, the springing step he had found it hard to keep pace with in brighter days was growing heavy and listless. "Missy was pinin'." He knew well what for. There had gone away from her one even dearer than father or brother. Lige knew of the rumors that had floated to the big house concerning him. He was sick. He was in

hospital at Vicksburg. The old man conceived an heroic resolve. Perhaps he could get him home. Then the light would come back to his "dear chile's" eyes and the elasticity to her step. It was hard to go away without telling "ol' Miss," but if he should fail it would be worse than ever. For a little while they must think what they would of him. They did think unspeakable things of him. "Lige had gone over to the enemy!" Who then could be relied on? There was no special discomfort entailed by his disappearance. He had seen to all that, and a son of his own loins assumed his duties *pro tem*. But no one could supply Lige's place. The mistress marveled and moaned; the girl for whose sake he was consenting to be cruelly misunderstood for a little while, waxed wordy in her indignation, and said in her haste he was a traitor. How harshly all her hot words came back to her when one evening, as she paced the long gallery of the big house, watching with listless gaze the sun set in a blaze of purple and gold, wondering bitterly in her sore heart why men must fight and women must weep, the wooden latch of the front gate was lifted by a quick hand, and there, coming up the walk, leaning heavily on old Lige's arm, was the one of all others in the wide world she most yearned to see. She was down the steps and by his side in a second, wondering, laughing, crying, the light already back in her eyes and the buoyancy of her heart communicating itself to her step.

"I fotch him, Missy," was all old Lige said at that moment, but later on he told them how he had traveled by night in his staunch and well-provisioned little

skiff, lying by in wooded coves by day, eluding pursuit, laboring untiringly, encouraging the sick and heartsore boy, who lay in the boat on his heap of blankets ; reaping his reward beforehand in the reflection that he was carrying peace and joy back to his " dear chile," and that " ol' Miss " herself would approve of his course of conduct.

But all that was since " Genul Jacksin " died, and although Lige's days of active service are well-nigh over, the cabin with the climbing roses is still his own, and if he does not wield the shovel and the hoe as vigorously in the garden beds it overlooks, nor drive the family carriage with as lofty an assumption of dignity, his sway is just as autocratic and his worth as highly rated as on the day when he supplanted French John.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MRS. NEW AND THE OLD FAMILIES.

WHEN Mrs. New looked through her open front door, across the flower-beds that cluster on both sides the raised brick walk that leads from her front gate to her front steps, and saw Major Morris's son helping her daughter Elmira into his handsome new center-board sailboat, with a view to escorting her across the lake to an entertainment to be given by his own mother, Mrs. Major Morris, she was consciously filled with that sort of pride that a conqueror feels at the successful termination of a long and doubtful campaign. And when young Morris, with the tiller ropes in one hand, gayly waved her, with the other, the assurance that Elmira was all right, Mrs. New meditatively bit off the end of the thread she had been abstractedly aiming at the point of her needle for some seconds in a pretense of indifference to their movements, said "At last" softly to herself, and went back indoors in an unusually placid frame of mind. Mr. New's pointer, "Mingo," exempt from active duty on the score of old age, was the beneficiary of her overflowing good-will on this occasion, and with canine astuteness saw with his one purblind eye that it was not necessary for him to vacate the sitting-room hearth-

rug with his usual precipitancy. Not that Mrs. New does not consider her daughter Elmira handsome enough, and refined enough, and bright enough, to have all the young men and all the center-board sail-boats in the country at her disposal, and she (Mrs. New) is glad that the fact of Major Morris's own son coming for her has not the significance for Elmira that it has for herself. Elmira knows nothing of the silent warfare her mother engaged in long before her birth and sees no special occasion of triumph in the fact of young Morris's gallant attentions.

The Morrisses are the very oldest people in the county. No one can remember when a Morris did not plant the "Shallows" place just across the lake from "Big a-plenty," the News' place. Local tradition had it that the first Morris employed Indians to pick his cotton seed from the lint, and that two pounds an evening was an adult's task, all of which had an imposingly antique sound, and carried the Morrisses way back yonder beyond Whitney's great invention of the cotton gin. No greater proof of respectability could be asked or given ; whereas the News only went back a very little way, and over debatable ground at that. Mr. New's father, Elmira's grandfather, had been an overseer, and only became a landholder through the misfortunes or misdeeds of his own employer ; consequently he had always been regarded in the light of a pretender, and it would have taken more than two generations, under normal conditions, to wipe out the stigma of overseer origin from the name of New. The overseer was a sort of middleman between the master and slave, and was regarded rather as a necessary

evil than as a social element. The planter stood to his slaves as a sort of higher tribunal, to which appeal could always be carried from this official, whose decisions were oftener guided by expediency than by any sense of abstract justice. Self-reliance, physical strength, and common-sense being the only essentials in the selection of an overseer, one was seldom found in the ranks of the refined or the educated. Socially he was an outcast. If India's test of caste had been applied, the overseer would have been considered a pariah. But fortunately the irrevocability of Brahmin regulations did not hold good, else Mrs. New would never have had the satisfaction of seeing her daughter Elmira handed into a sailboat by Major Morris's son Harry, and he a Yale graduate at that.

Mrs. New has no harrowing memories of the war, but on the contrary, secretly regards herself as the proverbial beneficiary of an ill-wind. Not having any sons to be killed, there are no vacant chairs or nameless mounds somewhere to counterbalance her satisfaction in the fact that if the war did not lift her to Mrs. Major Morris's level, it brought Mrs. Morris down to hers. Before the war, if Mrs. New got on a steamboat to go to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, although she might obtain the "pick" of the staterooms and occupy a seat at the Captain's table (which was tantamount to sitting above the salt in feudal days), and be proudly conscious that on the decks under her feet were a hundred bales of cotton that Mr. New had shipped to his merchants, the biggest single shipment made from the county, there was still an aching void to be filled, especially if the Colonel's wife or Mrs.



Major Morris chanced to be going to Mardi Gras on the same boat. For Mrs. New was too astute an observer not to feel the distinction between the courtesy bestowed upon herself by the Captain and the "lady's clerk," and the fat consequential colored stewardess of the boat, and that reserved for the old families exclusively. Since the war, however, things have changed on the boats as elsewhere, and as the older families themselves have developed more practical or more democratic tendencies, the lines of demarkation are not so sharply drawn by those time-serving officials.

Before the war the fact that Mrs. New "ran a market-cart" counted among her disqualifications for polite society, although quite legitimate for *her* (antecedents understood). Not but that in the absence of markets and green-grocers in the town, the semi-weekly appearance of Mrs. New's ancient blue cart, drawn by its ancient brown mule, harness-scarred and knock-kneed, driven by its ancient black marketman, "Uncle Merrick," with his brilliant carpet cap surmounting his gray wool, was a beneficent institution and a refreshing sight. For where else were such golden pounds of butter, printed with a big thistle and wrapped in snowy muslin, to be procured? Where else could the freshness of the creamy Bramah and the speckled guinea eggs (delight of epicurean palates) be relied upon so absolutely? Who else ever sent such fat pullets, such crisp celery, such marrowy asparagus, such luscious strawberries, from door to door in a steady supply of creature comfort? Old Merrick generally marked the stoppage at his regular customer's door with a big

bunch of roses or violets sent with "Missis's compliments," which was one of Mrs. New's subtle efforts at lifting her market-cart out of a purely mercenary rut. Since the war the Colonel's wife and Mrs. Major Morris also run market-carts, and Mrs. New is quite willing to divide the profits for the sake of dividing other things (odium, for instance), and she sends her supplementary roses and violets now more as "lagniappe" than as propitiatory offerings. Circumstances alter cases.

Before the war it had been whispered about that in the busy season, that is, when the cotton crop was ready to be picked out, Mrs. New had given the crowning evidence of avarice in turning all her yard force, except her milk-woman, into the fields, and had done all her own work for weeks, claiming for pin-money all the cotton picked by her "house hands," which, of course, was rather praiseworthy, seeing the cotton would otherwise have been wasted; but the voluntary surrender of a cook, and a washwoman, and a gardener, and a dining-room boy, and a house girl, and a poultry-tender, and a dairy-maid, displayed as much of the mercenary spirit as it did of personal endurance. Some people could do such things profitably. Others would lose more, in a variety of ways, than the accruing pin-money would compensate for. Since the war almost any honest measure for keeping the wolf at a distance was not only legitimate, but laudable, and so one more stain was wiped from Mrs. New's 'scutcheon, for inconsistent as humanity is, it does not rail at people for doing what it does itself—at least, not always. Not that Mrs. New has ever conspicuously or even

visibly gloried in these signs of regeneration on the part of her neighbors ; she has simply been glad, that was all, that her own attitude has become less *peculiar*.

Yes, after all, the war did a good deal for Mrs. New ; it showed her the road to some of her neighbors' hearts, and she was not slow to follow it. It was then that women, thrown back upon themselves and each other, began to place a truer estimate on some of the frivolities as well as some of the solid things of life. It was when Major Morris had gone off to Richmond, at the head of the Redtown Rifles, leaving Mrs. Morris to run the place as long as there were any hands to run it with, that Mrs. New felt herself for the first time in a position to pity the oldest family in the county. There is a solid element of comfort in being able to pity people that have always stood on a social ledge above you, and Mrs. New extracted all the comfort possible out of the situation compatible with a real desire to console her neighbor. It was then that Mrs. Morris, for the first time, found herself in a position to admire Mrs. New as a woman of wonderful energy and fertility in invention. There was no use being stiff-necked with your nearest neighbor at a time when total annihilation of every thing and every body seemed not only possible, but imminent. So when Mrs. New rowed across the lake, but "wouldn't get out," just to send Mrs. Morris a lot of freshly-cured palmetto for hat plaiting, as she had heard palmetto was very scarce in the "Shallows" woods, Mrs. Morris rowed across from her side the very next day to thank Mrs. New for the palmetto, and to tell her she had discovered that pecan bark

and alum would dye a beautiful bottle-green ; and she did get out, and walked all around Mrs. New's flower-garden, and vegetable-garden, and dairy, and poultry-yard, inspecting things precisely as she and the Colonel's wife, who were just like sisters, always inspected each other's premises. And that was the beginning of it. There was so much that each could teach the other ; and if during these interviews Mrs. Morris ever thought of ante-bellum barriers at all, it was with an inner reflection that when things returned to ante-bellum conditions, as, of course, they would, they (the barriers) could be re-erected, if necessary, as strong as ever. In the meantime, it was really comforting to have such a neighbor. While they were all moaning over their deprivation of flour and of coffee, Mrs. New was perfecting all sorts of experiments. The coffee she made out of okra seed, and roasted sweet potatoes, actually did taste like coffee, if you drank it very hot and in rapid gulps, and the corn-meal that she bolted through tarletan made almost as good muffins as real flour. Mrs. New found greatness thrust upon her when she succeeded in making candle-molds out of cane roots, and light once more issued out of darkness when she sent Mrs. Morris a dozen candles made from the beef and mutton tallow that had been accumulating all the years while Mrs. New's market-cart had been her peripatetic reproach. "They were just as firm and white as store candles," Mrs. Morris said in an enthusiastic little note of thanks, and Mrs. New felt that she had not lived in vain.

Moments come into every life that quench egotism

so completely that one marvels at its ever again resuming potency. They came into Mrs. New's life when word came across the lake that Mrs. Morris's two little girls were very ill. Such an awful time to be ill! No doctors, no drugs, no earthly comfort of any sort, but what one mother heart could pour into another mother heart. Mrs. New forgot then that the "Shallows" people antedated the Whitney invention, and Mrs. Morris forgot that Mr. New's father had been an overseer. There was nothing worth the remembering but two small hot-handed sufferers that seemed to bind them together. And when the end came, writing the word "finis" to two very short chapters of human experience, Mrs. New hesitated only a few minutes as to whether she should send her black velvet circular or her black alpaca dress up to the carpenter's shop where two bare pine coffins were being made for the tiny dead of the richest people in the county. The velvet circular was sent, and the little Morrises were not laid away quite like paupers. And after Mrs. New had herself read the solemn "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," over the two little velvet-covered coffins, for lack of some higher dignity to read it, she always felt as if she had a proprietary interest in the Morrises, quick and dead.

After the war there was no household that adjusted itself to the altered conditions quicker than the one Mrs. New presided over. Perhaps that was because it was less encumbered with accumulated traditions and inherited dignity. Mrs. New's life-time motto had been not to cry over spilled milk. She persistently set herself to work to make the best of the situa-

tion. If the darkies were free and were "bound" to waste their wages on somebody, they might as well waste them on her, so for the first year or two after the war Mrs. New tried to divert many an honest penny from the tills of dishonest shopkeepers, who swarmed at every cross-road, by stocking her own storeroom shelves with sardines, and blue buckets, and brass jewelry, and it was even suspected that she made dresses for the colored ladies on the place, who were notoriously exacting in the manner of "pullbacks" and "polynays." Not that Mrs. New publicly announced herself as a fashionable dressmaker for the "Big-a-plenty" quarters, but the colored ladies of that plantation were observed to go to meeting on Sundays with the best fitting and most stylish-looking dresses to be seen in the county. She was rather glad than not that Elmira was away at school in those first years of restoration, when things were so new and rough on the plantations.

Mrs. New's faith in the recuperative powers of the South is absolute and unshakable. She admits that the Confederates were overpowered by numbers, but she does not think the final result altered the principles involved at all. She is not one of those people, however, who don't know when they were whipped, and she firmly believes that by the time Elmira's children are coming on and growing inquisitive about the war, she will be able to give them information totally devoid of any acrimony, which she is not quite sure she could do just yet. She is a readjuster to a certain extent, and mildly advocates the advisability of educating the nation's wards, but when the nation's wards, as ex-

emplified in Miranda, her chambermaid, persist in stopping off at ten o'clock to go to a music lesson, Mrs. New is conscious of mental reservations concerning the Blair Educational Bill. The limits of her world have been contracted since the war. She does not go to Mardi Gras every year as she used to ; the money once spent in that way is now saved for Elmira, and she does not ride into town in the buggy with Mr. New when word reaches her that somebody is going to preach at the Court House. The buggy is just naturally worn out, and she does not care to invest in the new vehicle until Elmira comes home from school "finished." If she goes to town at all these days, it is in a chair in the two-mule wagon, which is more safe than elegant, especially if the summons has been so sudden that Merrick hasn't had time to take the cockle-burrs out of the mules' tails and manes. But she is not the only one who will go to church in a mule wagon sitting on a chair, and it is astonishing after all how one can get used to doing without things. The war furnishes her a precedent for almost every happening. She likes to think that Elmira's memory does not go back to those days, and that there is nothing in the present social code of the neighborhood to point to any difference between "The Shallow" and "Big-a-plenty."

Her days pass very monotonously in a round of domestic duties, and she sometimes wishes she could find as much time to read as Mrs. Morris and the Colonel's wife do. She does not know how they get things attended to, but as for herself, she hardly has breathing-time from the moment she has finished

putting up her mincemeat in December up to August, when she begins the preserving and pickling for the year.

Mrs. New virtually camps out in preserving and pickling season. She couldn't think of such a thing as doing such hot work in doors. Her tables and kettles and charcoal furnace and baskets of fruits and herself, are to be found through all the day-lit hours out in the back yard under a big pecan tree, and while the syrup boils and bubbles up in soft white puffs, she dexterously peels bushel after bushel of apples and peaches, and Mr. New happens around to taste the finished specimens sunning in big meat-dishes on the table under the tree, and Mingo manages to put himself in the way of being scalded with hot scum every few seconds. The summer wanes and Mrs. New's pantry shelves gradually accumulate a quantity of preserves, and pickles, and jellies that are the admiration and the envy of Mrs. Morris and the Colonel's wife, who always had somebody to look after those things for them before the war.

Men say that New has just the right sort of a wife for the times, and that if she is training her daughter to be like herself somebody is going to get another good wife some of these days. And when the Major's son comes to see Elmira, as soon as she gets home for vacation, Mrs. New falls to castle-building, and rejoices to think that her daughter will never suffer from the conventional distinctions that marred her own early wifehood.



## CHAPTER IX.

### WHY A NEW DOCTOR WENT THE ROUNDS.

YOUR city doctor, who responds promptly to your telephonic summons, leaving his tall silk hat and kid gloves on your hall rack for the brief second of time he has to spare for diagnosis, may be the very best local specimen of his genus, but the genus is one that varies immensely, according to soil and climate, and he will be found to possess only a generic likeness to the physician who does not find his limitations within brick-walled streets. The one is continually being pricked into a brisker gait by the spurs of competition and emulation ; the other ambles easily through life at a leisurely pace, conscious of a superfluity of time and an undisputed territory. The one has no time to train the tendrils of affection around every projection ; with the other, they grow into and all about the hearthstones that are his particular charge. The one prescribes a remedy, the other administers it.

There was old Dr. Goodman, for instance, in — Parish, Louisiana (green grow the grass above his grave !) why, he was doctor and druggist, and nurse and minister, all in one. Minister, indeed ! his life was one long ministry to the welfare of others. No

one ever saw him with a ruffled brow or a smooth shirt-front. His shoes were always dusty in summer and muddy in winter. He would have looked like a guy in a tall hat, and nothing but the direst extremity of cold ever led to the imprisonment of his pudgy brown hands in gloves, which, being simply regarded as protectors, were always the very biggest and clumsiest and warmest of their kind, usually huge yellow buckskin affairs of the unyielding variety that would take the impress of the Doctor's ample hands, and retain it so faithfully that they looked no more empty lying on the hall table by the side of his old brown felt hat than they did when in active service. A pair of gauntlets generally lasted the Doctor about two winters—the longer, perhaps, because of a certain tendency on their part to misplace themselves. It was a rare thing for him to know where his gloves were in event of an unexpected call, and, as his hat and his saddle-bags, with little compartments in them for bottles and powders and pills, and a few simple surgical instruments, were the only absolutely essential equipment for a sortie, he seldom wasted precious time hunting for them. Beneath the crumpled shirt-front which nobody liked, but every body condoned, beat a big heart that never grew callous to the cry of distress, and whether the summons came in the early brightness of a fresh spring morning, or in the chilling depths of a winter's night, the Doctor, with heroic disregard of his own personal comfort, answered as promptly as was compatible with the more phlegmatic temperament of Whitestocking, his old "clay-bank" horse, who was his faithful but deliber-

ate coadjutor in good works for nearly a score of years. When one has to send miles over rough country roads for a doctor, fancying, perhaps erroneously, that the need is a mortal one, one is apt to lay more stress upon a ready response to the call than upon boots guiltless of stain or hands fastidiously clothed.

The Doctor lived in town—that is there was a little four-roomed cottage, sitting away back in a big barren five-acre front yard at one end of the village, which was called Dr. Goodman's house, but it was the very last place in the world to look for him in. It was a cozy little affair, latticed in all around the underpinning, with a low, unbalustraded veranda, about the six white pillars of which grew as many different vines in luxuriant rivalry. There was the madeira vine, and the red cypress vine, and the coral honeysuckle, and the white "Lady's Bank" rose, and the purple wistaria, and the glorious yellow jessamine, each clothing its appointed post with beauty and fragrance all its own. The house itself was intensely green as to its shutters. Back of it was a sweet old-fashioned flower-garden, where lady-slippers and the hollyhocks ran riot, but the bare front yard was sacred to grass and to Whitestocking. The Doctor would as soon have thought of putting his own legs in the stocks as of stabling Whitestocking. Still back of the riotous flower-garden was a group of ramshackle out-houses, among which was a doorless shed called grandiloquently Whitestocking's stable, but it was viewed with great disfavor by an animal who was sure of distinguished consideration in every stable in the county; and Whitestocking never tarried under

its lowly roof any longer than was absolutely necessary to consume his morning's rations of fodder, or during an unusually severe storm. That was why any body, riding up in quest of the Doctor, felt pretty sure, if Whitestocking was not nibbling the Bermuda grass in the front yard, and the Doctor's saddle and bridle were not in equally full view on the front gallery, there was pursuit of him to be gone through with further on.

In the city you have doctors, in the country they have *the* doctor, a potent personality, combining all the knowledge that more fortunate localities divide and subdivide among innumerable specialists. And still the wonder grew how one bald head could carry all he knew. The Doctor radiated from the little white and green house in the five-acre yard in all directions for a circuit of twenty miles. People said it was too much for him. Ambitious young medicos would only too gladly have convinced him that he needed a partner. He smiled benignantly on all such suggestions, cordially welcomed new doctors to the field on an independent basis, but waved aside all suggestions of partnerships with a light jest at its being possible for him to "over-do" himself. "Mollie'll see that I don't break down," he would say in answer to disinterested insistence, "Mollie's a great help."

"Mollie" was Mrs. Doctor Goodman, and whenever the country roads were such that the Doctor could put Whitestocking in the shafts instead of under the saddle, Mollie and he would make the rounds together, oftener than not with a basket carefully held

steady by their four substantial feet in the bottom of the buggy, in which would be such chicken broth, such wine jelly, and such wafers as nobody but the Doctor's wife knew how to make. She was an admirable supplement to the Doctor. If the friends of his patient grew worn with watching, or waxed untrustworthy by reason of over-anxiety, he would bring Mollie when he came again ; one night of her nursing would do more good than all the physic in his saddle-bags. If an operation trying to any body's nerves was to be performed, he wanted Mollie about. Mollie was as cool as a cucumber ; she stood fire well. If he lost in his hand-to-hand fight with Death, it was Mollie who came softly in his wake, pouring balm into the bruised heart and finding words of spiritual consolation for the mourners, which was more in Mollie's line than the physic. That is the reason it was generally regarded as a rather bad omen when the Doctor's wife left the flower-garden and the poultry-yard, which filled up the time so pleasantly for her during his long absences, and appeared by his side in the buggy. His absences would sometimes extend over the night and over the next day, and into the next day perhaps, for it was not the inmates of the "big house" alone to whom her "good man" ministered. It was to the numberless souls in the cabins in the quarter lot, for whose "doctoring" the master was personally responsible, and who depended upon the big house with childlike reliance for professional attention when their ailments got beyond the simpler remedies that the mistress was skilled in.

There was no more of formality in the Doctor's life

than there was in his dress. The house of each patron was his home for the time being, and his tastes were consulted with as much affectionate consideration, under whatever roof he chanced to find himself at meal-time, as by Mollie herself. The deliberation with which he stayed on at the plantation for which he had set out in such hot haste was comical. Once satisfied that the "case" was such as would yield readily to treatment, and no sybarite could become more suddenly self-indulgent than he. Whitestocking remanded to the stable, and his saddle-bags reposing on a side table in the sick-room, he would give himself up to enjoyment of the well members of the family, and to kindly inquiry into the status of the entire place, with that singleness of heart and keenness of sympathy which made the whole lot of them his kin *pro tem*. There was the mother's spleen to be inquired for, and the baby's coming teeth to be voluntarily inspected, with perhaps the lancet brought into use from the saddle-bags in the sick-room. There was the health of the quarters to be discussed and a little gratuitous advice to be given concerning the cleaning out of the cisterns in view of cholera rumors. There was the prospect of war in Europe and of worms in the cotton crops to be reviewed with the master. There was dinner to be eaten and a cigar to be smoked afterward. There was the projected barn to be talked of and his solicited opinion concerning the site and the size to be given, his interest in the family extending even to the rafters and the girders of the new building. There was the string of fresh fish from the bayou, if it was spring, or the lot of ducks if it was winter, to

be tied to the ring in Whitestocking's saddle, when he started homeward, which he might as well do by way of the quarters, so he could stop at old Dinah's cabin and see if that last prescription of his had routed her asthma ; and all this was to be accomplished with a running interspersion of visits to the sick-room, whose occupant was the prime cause of his presence. No one ever seriously lamented over a slight ailment that was just a good excuse for summoning Dr. Goodman, for as a medium of communication with every part of the parish he stood without a rival, and was an excellent substitute for a local newspaper. Friends who were truly friends, without being equal to the exertion of a correspondence, would ply him indefatigably for all the news concerning those whom they would rarely hear of or from but for the Doctor. He was a kindly-natured medium who told all the good he knew and discreetly suppressed all the evil. But many a bit of local news would find its way from plantation to plantation, retailed deliberately, as the Doctor, with an upturned dinner-plate for a pill tile, would compound a supply of quinine pills for his patient, by the aid of a pinch of flour and a drop of molasses. Capsules were an undreamed-of refinement in his day, and a local druggist would have inspired him with envious disgust. He mixed his own nauseous potions with smiling benignity.

The world would perhaps have been the wiser and the better for some of the cogitations that occupied the Doctor's active brain in his long and lonely rides from one plantation to the other. Nature had intended him for a student of science. Fate intermeddled and

made a country doctor of him. Nothing could prevent his being an original thinker, and many a novel conception, which, with proper nourishment, might have achieved the dignity of a theory—a beneficent theory, perhaps—had its germ within the cool recesses of the woods, where the gray Spanish moss made a perpetual twilight around him as he rode.

No system of philosophy or ethics was too complex for him to grapple with, or too simple for him to entertain respectfully, without any of that personal vanity that made the code of morals, manners or medicine which he advocated the best in the world, simply because it was his code. He would listen with the earnest simplicity of an untaught child to opinions from any and every source, perhaps sending an ignorant boor away from his audience, comfortably elated by the conviction that he had taught the Doctor something. Some misapprehensions were due to this admirable mental equipoise, and the fair-mindedness which led to his examining and weighing the evidence for and against every new problem that presented itself. The spiritualist who was stopping over all night at Colonel Benson's, when little Rob Benson was suffering from the accidental discharge of his shot-gun, and who poured his nebulous notions wholesale into the Doctor's patient ears, as he placidly picked the bird-shot from Rob's wounded foot, went away satisfied that he had left an intelligent and zealous convert behind him, and consequently deluged the Doctor with spiritualistic literature for months subsequent. The ritualist minister, who held high carnival periodically in the pretty little Gothic church on "the



square," felt morally sure that it would require but the slightest amount of exertion on his part to transform the Doctor into a shining light in his Episcopal Church. The Methodist parson was equally sure the Doctor was in the right path, and, if Darwin could have looked upon him with the eye of flesh as he devoured his theories of evolution, he would have congratulated himself on so promising and intelligent a disciple. Not that the Doctor was in any sense of the word a truckler to other men's opinions, but an honest Mohammedan would have met with as respectful a hearing from him as the Dean of St. Paul's. The honesty was all he insisted upon. Its absence in any matter, small or great, was what he could never forgive.

It was a sort of exaggeration of this virtue, if such a thing is possible, that set the Doctor to "keeping books" during and after the war. Before that time his financial transactions were of the simplest possible sort. There were so many plantations within his beat. The owner of each plantation paid him so many hundred dollars for medical attendance. It was a comfortable arrangement for him, and on the strength of it, the slave and the master, the darkey baby in its clumsy wooden cradle, and the darling of the big house, shared alike in his attentions and his drugs. But it was when the maxim, "Every man for himself," virtually came in with the new order, that the Doctor began to keep books, and was forced to take a personal and onerous interest in the cotton crops of his parish.

The Doctor's books are still extant. They are very

curious specimens of the accountant's skill. Debit and credit stand in odd relation to any known legal-tender. One page from his funny day-book would repay perusal. If the Doctor had ever been forced into litigation, it is very doubtful if his books would have been taken in testimony against the most flagrant offender. All of the leisure time that used to be spent by him and "Mollie" wandering through the new lettuce-beds or the radish rows, in the little garden where the hollyhocks and the dahlias flaunted their bright heads abreast of the tall fence-pickets, were consumed, in those later days, in frenzied efforts to make his books balance.

Who could make a balance out of "Henry Giles' Child—one fit—calomel one dose—owes sixty pounds lint cotton"; "Molly's boy—youngest—congestive chill—chloroform and quinine—twice—one hundred pounds lint"; "Benson's teamster—mule kick—surg. op.—one bale cotton"; "The Davis darkeys—chills—one ounce quinine—three bushels sweet potatoes—bottle of Cholagogue—six pullets"; "Cholera on Pratt's place—darkeys club together—one colt this fall—two bales cotton—etc., etc."

It was then that the Doctor's crops began to come in, one bale at a time, a pinched-looking bale, perhaps, composed of the sum total of all the scattered pounds of lint cotton owing him on one place, gathered conscientiously together by his debtors and pressed into one bale, to be hauled to town with the next shipment and dumped down in the Doctor's big front yard, where it would lie waiting for a rise in the Liverpool market, or for more of its kind, taking its

chances of wind and weather, an object of fright and scorn to Whitestocking, who eyed it with evident disapproval in the light of a legal-tender for services in which he had performed no insignificant part. Perhaps, when the crops were all ginned, the Doctor's share would amount to some seven or eight bales, when he would brand it with his own initials and private mark and ship it, for weeks thereafter taking an unusual interest in the cotton quotations in the New Orleans papers. It was in those days that the Doctor's wife, true helpmate that she was, began to take entire supervision of the dispensary. The Doctor's own benevolent preference would have been to give away his drugs as freely as he gave of his cistern water to all his improvident neighbors during the drought, but the Doctor's wife, fortunately for him, had a prudent streak with which to offset his uncalculating generosity, so she reminded him that "times were not what they used to be," to which he assented with a sigh ; and that "they were both getting old," to which he assented with a smile; and that "his books were as much as he could attend to when not on the road," to which he assented with a groan ; "so the dispensing of the drugs had better be left to her," to which he assented with that absolute confidence in Mollie's superior wisdom which was the outcome of many placid years of conjugal life and mutual confidence. By what process of mental arithmetic the Doctor's wife computed how many eggs would purchase a dozen quinine pills, or how many quarts of blackberries would be fair compensation for a porous-plaster, or how many long-necked cashaws would offset a pint of castor oil, was known to herself

alone ; but when the eggs and the pullets and the sweet potatoes and " garden truck " accumulated with unusual rapidity during the sickly season, the Doctor would enter his simple protest : " No profit, my dear, no profit. Simply cost of drugs ; remember that." And Mollie remembered that conscientiously. Nobody complained of her as an extortioner.

But the day came when Mollie dispensed the drugs with mechanical caution and took her odd returns with listless indifference ; when the Doctor's crop accumulated in the front yard, without any one caring to ship it ; when Whitestocking waxed fat and lazy on the grass in the big yard, and would stand for hours with his long head resting on the top board of the front fence, wistfully wondering what this long and unprecedented vacation for himself meant ; when a young and untried physician went the rounds of the plantations with an oppressive sense of intrusion into another man's domain, and was abjectly certain that he was only sent for because *the* Doctor could not be procured : when the men were divided between words of blame for Doctor Goodman and expressions of profound admiration ; when the women were unanimous in their outcry against him for endangering a life so important to them and theirs : when the Memphis papers were waited for eagerly until the rigid quarantine regulations shut off the final source of information as to what was befalling the man who was enshrined in the heart of every man, woman, and child within his own parish, but who had recklessly gone away from them at the risk of his precious life.

Memphis lay palpitating under the scourge of yellow

fever. Her cry for help had rung throughout the land. More nurses, more doctors, more skill—that was all her plaint. His great heart responded with a bound to the wail of suffering humanity. For only a few agitated days and nights he debated the course of duty with his own conscience. Once his course decided before that high tribunal, no power on earth could sway him a hand's breadth. 'The greatest good to the greatest number must be the right thing to aim for. It carried him away from his home with the peace of early sunrise resting on its vine-clad gallery like a benediction. The sound of Mollie's sobs and the faint perfume of the "Lady Bank" roses followed him as he rode away on the path conscience pointed out. They abode with him many a long day afterward, as he went to and fro untiringly among the sick and the dying, and the panic-stricken of the pestilence-swept town clung to him, but, at last, in the very hour of victory, when the silent foe loosed his awful death-grip and was slinking out of sight, he paused for one more rally. Death chose a shining mark in that fatal rally, and the Doctor went down. Strange hands ministered to the man who had come voluntarily to them in the hour of their mortal need; ministered tenderly, skillfully, unavailingly. No one knew it sooner than he, no one had to announce the inevitable to him. It was he who, looking up into the tearful faces of his new-made friends, said to them: "Tell Mollie not to blame me for coming. I couldn't help it. I would do it all over again. Poor Mollie!" Then he fell asleep.

Grateful hands erected a costly shaft over him and

grateful hearts dictated the epitaph that tells how he came to them and cheerfully gave up his life for them, and he is embalmed among the most sacred local traditions of the people for whom he died. But the void left by his taking-off is not there. It is down in the lowlands, where he had been friend, guide, and healer to more than one generation of loyal adherents ; it is in the little green and white house, behind the flower-wreathed veranda, where a lonely widow dispenses the drugs he left behind him with simple skill learned of him through more than two-score years of loving companionship—it is everywhere where the Doctor, with his rumpled shirt-front and his serenely benevolent smile, was a well-beloved and familiar entity whose place can never be filled.

## CHAPTER X.

### JIM BAILEY'S FOLKS.

HIDDEN away in the heart of the somber pine forests that cover with a dense growth some portions of the State of Mississippi, are to be found innumerable small farms that offer sharp points of contrast in every respect to the larger plantations in the rich "bottom lands" of the same State. They are scarcely more than clearings ("deadenin's," in the local vernacular) in the woods that begirt them with their columnar trunks and dark-green canopies. The resinous, health-giving breath of the pines makes of the dwellers in these poor lands a hardy race, who are, happily, themselves absolutely unconscious of the barrenness of the lives they lead, as seen from the æsthetic point of view.

Ugly black stumps stand thickly about in the rough furrows, whose stiff clayey clods promise scant crops of corn and scantier yields of "bumble-bee" cotton (better called "break-back cotton," because to pick it in its dwarfed growth is a sore trial to the spinal column of an adult). The "deadening" is marked by the gaunt specters of dead trees whose stripped trunks gleam with ghostly whiteness in the moonlight, and when they wave their useless limbs in sighing protest against the seasons that come and go,

and leave them still standing in helpless mockery of their former stateliness, a sense of isolation pervades every breast not grown callous to such influences, as, fortunately, the "piney woods folks" all have. The fencing that defines these roughly-cleared fields against the woods belongs to no particular school of architecture. The only essential point about it is that it must be pig-proof. The barren pine lands offer slight inducements for stock-raising, and the few lean kine that nose about in the brown fragrant needles, with a hopeless sense of wasted time, depend principally upon the stubble left in the ragged corn-fields after fodder-pulling time. They stand in a listless group near by the bars almost constantly. Experience has taught them that the far-away canebrake will scarcely be reached before a barefoot, hatless boy, with a retinue of a half-dozen yelping curs at his heels, will be urging their return with importunity that can not be slighted ; so enterprise ceases to be a bovine virtue, and the cattle learn to be as stolidly enduring as the men and the women to whose comfort they contribute, though meagerly.

The hill planter has what would emphatically be characterized as a "hard time of it" by men brought down to such conditions from a higher social plane, but having been born into it, and only knowing in a dull, theoretical way of any better mode of living, he accepts it as he does the sterility of the red clay he patiently plows and hoes and rakes year after year, and plants with cotton and corn and sweet potatoes and sorghum. He knows the "bottoms" are rich, while his own land is poor. But it is so, and that's



all of it. The hill lands are "his'n," the bottoms aren't. No socialist murmurings ever disturb the peace of his baked-clay hearth. No envious sighs are ever wasted upon his neighbor's fat kine and full barns. But he is not conscious of being a philosopher.

He knows and practices many sorts of thrift that would be "picayunish" in his richer neighbor, who ships his "ties" by the hundreds. There are rows of bee-gums lining the rude picket-fence that shuts the log-house in from the stumpy cornfields. There is a patch of broom corn in one end of the place that will find its way eventually in shape of round brooms into the town, where the hill-planter goes about Christmas time with his crop to sell, and a miscellaneous cargo to dispose of that will tax his one yoke of steers to their utmost hauling capacity. Life has never presented itself to him in any of its luxuriant phases. There has been no redundancy of any sort (children excepted) to render him careless of the present or avid of the future. He has no profound repinings or bounding ambitions. He is content to live on the dead level of practicality and common-sense. The philosophy of his existence resolves itself into a formula: "Whar's the use er frettin' over what can't be hindered?" The log-cabin to which he brought a bride as practical and as patient as himself seventeen years ago is not a thing of beauty, and if he had thought about it a little longer he would have "faced" it so that the blazing sun should not rise "smack" on the front gallery in the morning, and set equally as smack on the back gallery in the evening, thus giving

the hemmed-in little homestead the full but dubious benefit of its glare all day long ; but that's one of the things that can't be hindered now, so he sits on his gallery at resting-time and mops his furrowed brow in patient endurance of the glare and the heat that beat mercilessly down upon him. If he had it to do over again, he wouldn't swap his old mule Sandy off for that brood mare, for she's that broken-winded that he "darsn't" drive her out of a walk, and he's obliged to acknowledge he got badly "tuck in" that time ; but the mule's gone, and the mare's broken-windedness is another thing that can't be hindered, so he accommodates himself to her infirmities and doesn't fret because she is scarcely better than a dead-head on the farm. In moments of prolonged reverie, such as come to him of Sundays, or when he is tramping the woods with his gun on his shoulder, waiting for "Drab," who is trotting at his heels, to tree a coon, or in the early spring, when the one lopsided peach-tree that shades the iron chain-pump at the back door is all aflush with its dainty pink blossoms, and the soft hum of the bees fills his ears as he plows his semi-circular rows around the red-clay sides of the hill that has given his place the name of "Bailey's Knoll," there may come back to him dull echoes from a far-away past, in which there stirred within him a short-lived ambition to "be something," perhaps—a vague ambition and a still vaguer something. But that was when he went to school in Flaxville for a whole year, and got a lot of book nonsense in his head. His father soon got him out of that notion when he gave him "Bailey's Knoll," two mules, a wagon, and a stock of

poultry, pigs, and calves, and told him to "root for himself." He has been rooting ever since very patiently. And if the idea stirred up by the book nonsense of his Flaxville days ever intrudes, he puts it down with a strong will. Things are as they are, and it's the worst sort of foolishness to "fret" over what can't be "hindered."

The meager conditions of their lot seem to impress themselves upon the anatomy and physiognomy of the piney-woods folks. In spite of the wholesome atmosphere and the healing breath of the pines, a rosy cheek or a plump form is a rarity. Descriptively, they are sad. In point of fact they are simply stolid. Sadness presupposes disappointment, loss, failure of hope. Disappointment presupposes desire. The desires of these patient toilers of the woods seldom overtop their ability to fulfill them. They desire reasonably, hope practically, expect always within bounds of probability. In point of independence and honesty "Jim Bailey's folks," as the neighbors called the Knoll people, could have given many a theoretical and practical point. When Mrs. Bailey rode over to Mrs. Colonel Mason's place on the broken-winded mare to carry home the rag carpet which she had woven for the Colonel's wife on her little hand-loom, she was very proud of the gay product of her own industry, and descanted on its superiority to the worthless "two-plys" that it was to replace, with intelligent loquacity and no sense of personal inferiority to the fine lady who paid her liberally for the carpet. She "wouldn't change places with her for the world, if the Mason house did make forty of her cabin on Bailey's

Knoll. Mrs. Mason had some spine trouble, poor creature, and could only take the air in her fine carriage. No grandeur this world could afford would compensate Mrs. Bailey for the uselessness of her own sturdy homespun clad limbs. Besides 'Mason' was head over ears in debt to his commission merchants, and, thank God, Jim didn't owe any man a red cent." Nothing could exceed their horror of debt. Mrs. Bailey was not above taking hints from the superior elegance of her neighbors, and if it was any thing that Jim's ingenuity or industry could compass in some cheap form, some of the Mason belongings might be duplicated at Bailey's Knoll. It was with a sense of pardonable exultation that she would repeat the annual story of Mrs. Mason's preserves all "sourin'" and her pickles all "moldin'." No "slap-dash nigger" ever had the making of Mrs. Bailey's preserves and pickles. If it 'twasn't so "hard on the old man to ask for so much sugar," there would have been no limit to the jars of quinces and crab-apples and water-melon rinds, cut into wondrous shapes, that would have found their way into the little shed room that Mrs. Bailey called her store-room. But there was no use trying to feed seven mouths on "sweets" every day, so Mrs. Bailey's preserves were forthcoming only at long intervals, and then on occasion of some notable occurrence — a birthday perhaps. Pumpkin stewed in sorghum molasses, or an occasional sweet-potato pie, was luxury enough for Bailey's Knoll, as a usual thing.

Once a year there are signs of unusual activity at Bailey's Knoll. It occurs annually at about the same

period, that is, near on towards Christmas, when the two bales of "bumble-bee" cotton have been picked out by the entire family, including the smallest child, whose limited stature and nimble fingers render him peculiarly fit for the office, have been ginned and baled "over at Mason's" for a toll of lint, and have been hauled back home on the ox-cart to await the annual accumulation of truck with which it will be still further loaded on the day when Jim Bailey, perched on one of the opulent looking bales, and Mrs. Bailey, with a splintless sun-bonnet flapping about her sun-burned face, mounted on the wind-broken mare, will pace patiently to town; for Jim can not be trusted alone with so stupendous an undertaking as this trading expedition, on which the physical comfort of the entire family must depend for so many months. The disposition of the two bales of cotton for ready cash he can be trusted to attend to; but, besides that, the ox-cart will have several sacks of "yams" and yellow Spanish sweet potatoes. It will have great strings of tiny-grained popcorn, like many-colored ivory. It will have several gallons of strained honey, baskets of creamy eggs, from which the family have been rigidly excluded for weeks past; a score or two of squawking pullets tied together by the legs; a pillow-slip full of live geese feathers, that Mrs. Bailey has unflinchingly plucked with her own determined hand, in spite of the vociferous protest of the rightful owners thereof, held imprisoned between her unyielding knees. There will be shapely door-mats, made of corn-shucks, which Bailey and the boys have wrought at of evenings by the blazing light of their wood fires.

There will be a pile of 'coon skins that have one, by one ornamented the outer walls of the white-washed log cabin on the Knoll until duly stretched, and the interstices will be filled up with long-necked cashaws and huge yellow pumpkins. It will be an all-day's absence from home, and the period of tantalizing expectation it will inflict on the children left behind will be more than compensated for by a large sense of personal liberty. The dogs will walk boldly into the house to partake of the holiday with their two-legged companions. Martha, the nominal head of the family on the momentous occasion, prefers to tidy up after the boys rather than undertake the hopeless task of keeping them within bounds. Martha is a gaunt, sad-eyed girl of sixteen, who has had a love affair, and has never recovered from the bilious condition it threw her into. Her mother is of the impression it has "settled on her liver." The effects of it are mainly apparent in a certain slow irritability that most frequently finds vent on the boys.

When Jim Bailey sees the sun sinking behind the wooden steeple of Flaxville Methodist meeting-house, he knows it is time for him to put the yoke on the steers that have been comfortably munching their fodder under the big oak tree in front of "Govey's store," and to load up for home. If he, in the unusual excitement of talking over the crops with a lot of fellows at Govey's, neglects this sign of waning day, Mrs. Bailey will promptly remind him of it by waving her sun-bonnet at him over the palings of "Miss Brandin's" front yard, to which the broken-winded mare is tethered. She always goes to see Mrs. Brandon when she comes

in to Flaxville. In fact she and Jim always take their dinner there, securing a welcome by a lot of dried apples, some cashaws, and a quart or two of the strained honey that formed items of the truck. As the wagon creaks its way homeward through the darkening woods, it will have gained in the value of its load what it has lost in bulk. There will be "yellow domestics," "blue cotton checks," and red flannel galore. There will be a pair of new stout shoes for every member of the family, from Jim down to "little Jim," his latest born and his namesake. There will be huge hanks of blue and white yarn for the knitting of the "best socks"; Mrs. Bailey's own wheel can turn off an article good enough for every-day wear. There will be a lilac-calico and an embroidered muslin collar for "Marthy." "Marthy" is young yet, and if her liver isn't just quite right, she's entitled by reason of her youth and a certain prettiness that is magnified by the maternal lens, to a slight margin in the direction of frivolity. There will be a new slate and half a dozen slate pencils with barber-pole ornamentation on their blunt ends for Ben. Ben's slates are subject to catastrophes, and are seldom intact longer than a week from date of purchase, but they are regarded as sensible investments, for Ben shows a "turn for figgers," and is regarded as the possible future Rothschild of the concern. The stars light them on their homeward way as they go slowly, not minding the heavy tread of the tired oxen or the asthmatic breathing of the mare, for there is so much to tell. Jim has picked up no end of news at Govey's store, and what his wife has left ungleaned from "Miss Brandin's" field of gossip would

scarce.y repay the efforts of the most inveterate news-monger. There is the price at which the cotton went to be discussed, and the phrases of admiration elicited by the shuck mats to be repeated. There's the rumor that Mason's about to be "foreclosed on a mortgige" to be retailed cautiously ; there's the new "polonay" pattern kindly lent by Mrs. Brandon for the benefit of Martha's new lilac calico, to be described with all the mystifying minutiae of gore and "pin-back," for Jim's utter bewilderment, and there's the good solid piece of commercial luck to be gloated over in the ordering, by no less a personage than Govey himself, of a barrel of her best soft-soap. The ride home under the quiet stars is restful and pleasant to them both after the turbulent activity of a whole day spent in town.

The lamp is lighted in the "sitting-room," which is also the dining-room, when Jim gives one final resounding crack of his long ox-whip, more as a signal for the boys to come out and help unload than with a view to urge the steers to any further exertion, for the block stile is reached, and Mrs. Bailey has already jumped nimbly down into the yard and is fending off the tumultuous greetings of all the yard dogs, while she gives directions to the boys as to the disposition of the various boxes and packages, Jim is rapidly piling up on top of the stile. Her heart does not fail her at sight of the bolt of gray jeans piled on top of the yellow domestics and the blue cotton checks, although she knows that the task of transforming them all into wearing apparel for "the old man" and the boys will be all her own, without other aid than "Marthy's" slow, untrained fingers. No sewing-machine has added its



brisk clatter to the slow, soft melody of the spinning-wheel, which is the only music that ever stirs the silence of the cabin on the knoll. Fortunately, none of the Bailey folks are over-fastidious, and if Jim's new jeans suit, which he will conscientiously forbear putting on before Christmas Day, should turn out to be lacking in length of sleeves or trowsers-legs, if the difficulty in bringing the horn breast-buttons into friendly relations with their complementary button-holes, and a certain inaccessibility of pocket, should betray the 'prentice hand of Mrs. Bailey too pointedly, what matter? It will be ranked among those things that can't be hindered, and are therefore not to be fretted over.

There are very few things in this world that Jim Bailey does think worth fretting over, and those are all alterable things. One of the sorest trials he has so far been called on to endure is Martha's "mopin'," as he is pleased to call it. It involves a great disappointment to him. He and Mrs. Bailey had hit on a cheap plan for the education of the four white-haired, blunt-witted boys who complete their family of five children, and he rather resented any body's having it in his power to interfere with that plan. Marthy was the oldest, and Marthy was "real peert." She was put to board at Mrs. Brandon's, and had the advantage of two whole years of schooling. They meant she should have had three, but Mrs. Brandon wrote them word that the school-teacher, who was a young man, was "makin' a fool of Marthy, and nothin' less," which carried Mr. Bailey promptly into town. Finding that there was only too much ground for Mrs. Brandon's friendly note of warning, he wore out a stout cow-hide

whip and the schoolmaster's best black coat at the same time, and took Marthy home behind him on the mare. The schoolmaster left Flaxville that same night, and if the affair made much of a stir, nobody cared to discuss it with Jim Bailey, for under the long, lank, sandy hair that lies in smooth lines beneath his broad-brimmed slouch hat gleams a pair of rather dangerous-looking blue eyes. Marthy has never heard the schoolmaster's name mentioned since she came home ; he has dropped entirely out of her life, but there are times when a wave of recollection sweeps over her, and she recalls all the bright promises he made her, and all the beautiful things he promised she should see, and all the wondrous joy she should know, and then the whitewashed cabin on Bailey's Knoll looks like a prison to her, and the meaningless chatter of the boys jars on her, and she seeks refuge down by the spring, where only the birds and bees come to drink, where the dark shrubs close her in from sight of the fields, and it all feels as if somebody had laid a cool hand on her hot pulses and brought peace with it. She knows they will look darkly on her when she goes back to the house, for her father is always his coldest to her after one of "Marthy's spells," which is the reason Mrs. Bailey is so insistent about its being her liver. Sentiment in any of its manifestations is something, in Jim's estimation, to bring the blush of shame to every honest cheek, and to have a girl of his "mopin' " about a fellow that "wasn't worth the powder that 'd kill him," was as near being a blot on his 'scutcheon as he could stand, without "frettin' " vigorously and outspokenly.

The building of castles in the air is not an occupation that consumes much time for "Bailey's folks." Perhaps Jim himself looks forward to the time when, the boys being all grown, he can take in more land and make more cotton. His wildest flight of imagination carries Ben triumphantly to a high stool at Govey's, which the head bookkeeper always occupies. If Ben shows a "leanin'" toward mercantile life, he shan't cross him. There'll be enough boys left to keep the old place moving, and to make things a little easier on him and "ma" when they shall be "gettin' on in years."

What goes on in the world beyond the belt of pine woods that begirts his little clearing is of small consequence to him. In a confused fashion he knows of the leading men and most notable public events, but he is no politician. He is the indifferent possessor of an undervalued vote. It never addresses itself to him in the light of a duty that he should go to the polls on election day, which he generally does, however, for the sociability of the thing, without any personal leanings for or against either candidate; and so long as there are no doctor's bills to pay on Bailey's Knoll, or any "lawyer chap sticking an impudent nose" into his private affairs for the benefit of any creditor; and cotton don't go below  $8\frac{1}{2}$  cents; and "ma" don't show any signs of failing, just so long will stolid Jim Bailey drink the cold spring water from the sweet big white gourd that hangs over the brass-bound cedar bucket on the back gallery corner shelf, and rid himself of the sweat of honest toil by the aid of the tin basin and roller-towel that are its near neighbors, with a

placid sense of material well-doing and the firm conviction that this being the best world he knows any thing about, there's no use "frettin'" about another one if it can possibly be "hindered."

## CHAPTER XI.

### M A M M Y.

WHAT a despot she was ! What a gentle, tart, coaxable, domineering old paradox, whom we children loved and feared extravagantly and unreasonably.

From an æsthetic point of view, Mammy was not satisfactory, but then no one ever thought of taking her from an æsthetic point of view. From the apex of her conical turban to the broad soles of her clumsy shoes, however, she was a good and comforting and wholesome thing to have about, although she was not what the old romance writer would have called "comely." She hangs in memory's picture-gallery as a short and shapeless personality, not built according to any known canon of Greek classicism ; with an exceedingly wrinkled black face, illumined by a pair of kindly eyes, and overtopped by a towering bandanna handkerchief, whose dazzling plaids were among the earliest object lessons our infantile brains coped with.

There is a certain pattern of blue plaid cotton still turned out of the mills that always evokes the familiar vision of Mammy on week days. (On Sundays she was gorgeous in a purple alpaca, trimmed with black

braid.) Her favorite plaid was the extremest, in point of size, the fashion would allow, and those plaids never by any accident matched at the seams, which was excessively trying to our sense of exactness. The large white horn buttons that confined the rigidly plain waist of her dress across her honest bosom have many a time left a fleeting impress on the fleshy tablets of our young cheeks. There was always a rather exaggerated hiatus between the hem of that cotton dress and the stout blue yarn stockings that clothed her nether limbs, but we children rather approved the conspicuity of those stockings, for we took a sort of proprietary interest in them.

We had all grown up together, as it were, in the big pleasant bedroom that looked out on the pomegranate bushes in the back yard. There was no more familiar article in that room than the huge ball of homespun yarn, bristling with Mammy's shining knitting-needles, by which were always suspended stockings in every conceivable stage of progress. She knitted only at "odd times." That meant if she was not smoothing somebody's refractory curls, or mending a tell-tale rent in somebody else's garments, or wiping the tears from a pair of childish eyes, or soothing the pangs of disappointment against her sympathizing bosom, she was plying her needles with a musical click that frequently assumed the proportions of a "buzz." Mammy was a guileful old soul. One of her favorite ruses to prevent our importunities for something to eat between meals was to extract a solemn promise of mute patience from us while she knit so many rounds in the "ribbing," the honesty of the bar-

gain to be left to our own calculations ; our reward—the coveted refreshment. In the absorbing interest of watching her swift speeding needles and counting the probationary rounds, the pangs of imaginary hunger would be dissipated and Mammy's end gained. Or else some childish peccadillo must be atoned for by the culprit's confinement in a chair close to her side until she turned the heel or narrowed a toe. If the croquet balls were clinking on the lawn beyond the pomegranate bushes, or the pecan trees were being thrashed in the hollow, the turning of that heel or the narrowing of that toe rivaled the bed of Procrustes in power to torture. But it was oftenest at night, when Mammy sat by the shaded lamp in the nursery, the cynosure of half a dozen pairs of sleepless little eyes, whose lids would not down simply because their rebellious owners had to go to bed by the clock, that the shining needles flew most uninterruptedly, furnishing a metallic accompaniment to the droning song or the weird story with which she beguiled us into drowsiness. It was a remarkable coincidence that Mammy's stories always embodied a prolix description of the especial sort of ill-doing that had overtaken any one of us that day, with a vivid portraiture of the awful catastrophe such evil tendencies must inevitably lead to if persevered in. All this to explain why Mammy's blue-yarn stockings are inextricably mixed up with the tenderest recollections of childhood.

I do not think it ever occurred to us to speculate on what became of Mammy every night after we went to sleep. I think we had a vague impression that she was wiped out, like a sum on the blackboard, until we

needed her again next morning. We could no more conceive of her leading an existence separate from ours than we could conceive of ours separated from hers, and that was manifestly impossible. Another one of our unshakable convictions concerning this central object in our young lives was that Mammy was the victim of unappeasable hunger, and no meal of our own was fittingly concluded without the selection of some choice bits to be carried in to her. The purveyor of a slice of sweet-potato pie or a buttered hot waffle was generally held by her in special esteem, and became an object of gnawing envy to all the others.

How inextricably the lines of her life were entangled with those of her "w'ite folks," and will be until death them do part! Her tears fell as hot and fast as any one's on the baby's little waxen face when she lay on a white-draped table in the parlor, that still summer day, her tiny hands folded peacefully about an unopened rosebud from the "bridal" rose-bush under mother's window. And how lost she seemed for so many mornings after that quiet burying in the family graveyard, in one corner of the garden! It had been her custom to take the baby from the arms of its other mother at earliest peep of dawn and transport her to the nursery, where its preternatural energy in the matter of early rising was used as the text for our confusion. And it was around the baby sitting in Mammy's lap, solemn-eyed but gravely approving, that the rest of us performed that erratic and turbulent ceremony which we called dressing. We all missed the baby, but long after it had faded into nothing more than a sweet far-away memory to our faithless young



souls, Mammy still plucked the weeds from among the violets that covered her grave, and kept within bounds the straggling branches of the tea-rose that shaded it. That special corner of the family burying ground was consecrated in her eyes forever. When the war broke out, how monstrous it seemed to her that any of her w'ite folks should have to go "soldiering" and leave their comfortable homes to be made food for powder. The *casus belli* was too far removed from her comprehension at first to have any bearing on the matter. Those two boys, Al and Fred, who strutted up and down the long gallery so consequentially on the morning of their departure for Richmond, were her "chillun." She had stood side by side with their own mother in ministering to their welfare from the cradle to that monstrous hour. She had stood between them and parental wrath a countless number of times. She had surreptitiously conveyed nourishment to them through the transom over the door often and often when that "heartless governess" of theirs had locked them up for bad lessons. And when Al had made his first essay in duck-hunting, at the tender age of eleven, who but Mammy had tramped across miles of marshy ground to the duck-pond to make sure that the first discharge of his gun had not bespattered the fields with his precious brains, as she solemnly predicted? And here they were, men; men with soldiers' caps set jauntily over their bright brown curls, and two rows of shining brass buttons on the breasts of their new gray jackets. They challenged her to a compliment, she gave them instead tearful smiles; then suddenly turning away from them she

disappeared within doors to return pretty soon with a black quart bottle, whose cork she was securing tightly by pressing a cap of softened yellow bees' wax all about it. 'This she extended to Al with an hysterical sob :

" Take it, son. H'it's balsam apple and whisky. It's mighty good for cuts en bruises, en ef my chillun git hurt, Mammy won' be nigh 'em to ten' 'em lak she wants t' be, but you jes' rub dat balsam apple inter de place right quick en h'it mebbe be de savin' ub yo' libes, son. If you git out'n it, write to Mammy for some mo'."

It was Mammy's final service to the boys who never came back ! That night she swept the yard fast and furiously. It was a sure sign of deep and uncontrollable emotion on her part. In the years of our unreasoning childhood we had always shrunk from her in temporary distrust after one of these episodes. We had known her to neglect every thing for short intervals, while she betook herself to the back yard, where the ground was bare of grass and beaten hard by the constant passage of feet from the outside offices to the big yard, where, with her round broom, made rudely of brushwood tied together, she would sweep and sweep until the dead silence of late night crept over the premises. We could hear the scratching of her brush-broom, and the lights would be put out in the kitchen, and the dogs up in the quarters would bark in that desultory, disjointed fashion that bespeaks slumber disturbed, and the stars would come out and dimly illuminate the tremulous apex of Mammy's agitated turban, and we children would finally creep into

bed, assisted by mother, where we would sobbingly condole with each other over the calamity of Mammy's being a crazy woman, and would be correspondingly surprised next morning on opening our eyes timidly to find her in her normal condition. No one ever referred to these volcanic eruptions. For a day or two, perhaps, Mammy's manner to us would be very meek and slightly tinged with apology, and we were not slow to recognize the fact that temporarily we had the upper hand of her ; but things would promptly readjust themselves on the old basis. In later years we came to understand these periodic "tantrums" as the only vent for a nature naturally impulsive and vehement, which, by circumstances denied the safety-valve of words, took refuge in violent and continuous action that left her physically exhausted and morally becalmed.

Before the war the broad tide of life and action on the plantation was, as it were, simply tributary to the narrower and deeper current that had its flow and ebb in the "big house." This made it possible for those who ministered most directly to that deeper current to lead dual lives of entire unlikeness. Even Mammy led her dual life, as we children came to understand, when we got older, with a sort of resentful surprise. We had known always that the "Tildy" who was celebrated in the quarters as being the champion shouter at "meetin'" and the best cotton-picker on the place was privileged to address our Mammy as "Marmy," and that Prince, who played the fiddle on Saturday night for the people to dance by, and who excelled in patting an accompaniment to old Sandy's

bones, shared that high privilege with her, but these were grown-up people who rarely came to the yard for any purpose, and our knowledge of them was slight ; and we knew also that when our daily votive offerings of sweet-potato pie, buttered hot waffles, mangoes, or baked turtle increased in embarrassing quantity, Mammy would pile them up on one end of the nursery mantel with the remark that "she'd tek 'em home, honey, to de ol' man ;" indeed, perhaps our information concerning Mammy's other life included the knowledge that Uncle Dave, who was so badly crippled with rheumatism that he could only sit in the sun under the sycamore tree that shaded the blacksmith's shop in the quarters, and make huge baskets for the cotton-pickers, was Mammy's "ol' man." But beyond marveling at any one's using the possessive pronoun to such an uncanny-looking object, our interest in Uncle Dave never extended. What was he to Hecuba or Hecuba to him ? We discovered what, in a startling fashion. Mammy was sitting by the open window when we opened our eyes one morning, not knitting, simply looking out of the window with a far-away gaze, as she smoothed her white, cross-barred apron over her knees with restless hands. All the sweet scents and sounds of spring time in the country came to our awakening senses through the open window behind her. The purple clusters of a *Pride of China* that grew close up to it were swaying to and fro and tapping the raised sash with their fragrant petals. We could see the orchard from where we lay and the great snowy banks of the plum blossoms. The hens and the ducks and the geese were engaged

in their matutinal squabble over the tray of clabber that Aunt Lily, the milk woman, placed before them the first thing every morning. We could hear Sam whistling at the wood-pile, where he was cutting wood for the kitchen stove, with those ringing blows of his sharp ax that made the big white ash-wood chips we were so fond of gathering up in our aprons to fill Aunt Rose's chip-box with, in a corner of the kitchen. We could hear the milk falling with a musical tinkle into the tin bucket Aunt Lily always kept for the "strippings" she defrauded the bleating calves of. Every thing was bright, and brisk, and comforting that morning except Mammy, and we marveled at it and wondered uneasily if she was going to sweep the yard that day, and "going crazy" again.

She turned her eyes on us when she discovered that we were lazily waiting to be ordered up, and said in a plaintive tone altogether new in our experience of her : " Git up, my sweeties, an' let Mammy dress you. Don' pester none dis mawnin', kase Mammy's heart's mouty so'; de han' uv de Lawd ben laid on her heavy sence las' night." Then she wiped her dear old eyes furtively on a corner of the plaid handkerchief, which she wore folded across her bosom, and got up to pour the water into the wash-hand-basin that she always put into a chair for our greater convenience, sighing ponderously the while.

No cherubs of recent importation from celestial heights could have behaved more perfectly than we did that morning, moving under the shadow of Mammy's unexplained sorrow. I fancy we thought it rested entirely with ourselves if Mammy should pass

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through this mysterious ordeal without recourse to her broom. Not that the mystery was of her making, for as soon as the family breakfast was concluded, and her "w'ite folks" were at leisure to listen to her tale of woe without unseemly interruptions of any sort, she told it all, and I think the tableau we formed about her, as she stood before our mother with her hands folded pathetically over her white apron, would have furnished good material for one of Rogers's groups, to be called "Bereavement," or, perhaps better still, "Sympathy"—as the sympathy was, in our crude estimation, largely in excess of the bereavement.

"My ol' man done lef' me, Miss," she began, dropping a courtesy that brought the hem of her short blue plaid dress into contact with the carpet; "he's gone to Vicksburg. De folks tol' 'im he could git a guv'ment mule en ten acres er groun' by goin' arter it, en he's done gone. My ol' man warn' much 'count, but de cabin's sorter lonesome widout him."

Here Mammy paused decorously to receive in dignified silence the condolences of her w'ite folks, which were rendered without stint, and the youngest member of our circle, never having yet experienced any affliction that cut sugar could not ameliorate, slipped off to the dining-room to procure a supply of that sort of comfort for our bereaved Mammy.

"An' dat ain' all," she resumed presently, as if economically minded in dispensing her bad news. "Prince done gone wid 'im, Miss—Prince, dat triflin' rapsallion er mine dat wouldn' know w'at t' do wid a guv'ment mule w'en he git him. But Prince were a

handy one wid de fiddle an' de bow, he were. I 'low dere won't be much dancin' er Saterdag nights in de quarters now Prince done tuk hisseff off en lef' his ol' Mammy—Iak Rachel in de Bible was lef'."

Another pause, during which mother poured in all the balm her own tender nature could concoct on such short notice, and more saccharine consolation was thrust into Mammy's apron pocket.

"But dar's mo' yet," said Mammy, lifting her turbaned head as if she were rising to a sense of the dignity of her position; "Tildy's gone too. I 'lows she don' wan' no guv'ment mule, ner no ten acres er groun'. I 'lows w'at she do want is a good lambastin', dat w'at she a-pinin' for. But de cabin's mouty lonesome, Miss. It's empty. An' it sorter hurts my feelin's to see de half-finished baskit de ol' man was workin' on w'en dis fool noshon struck him. An' I don' lak to look at Prince's fiddle case nuther, Miss (he tuk his fiddle 'long), and dar's Tildy's hoe layin' jus' whar she drap it w'en she pick up en' went 'way widout even tellin' her po' ol' Mammy good-by. Dey stole 'way yistiday, whiles I was up to de big house, jus' lak a fief in de night. De han' uv de Lawd is laid heavy on me, my sweeties."

Thus appealed to directly, the fountain of our tears burst forth and flowed in such alarming volume that Mammy became comforter in her turn. But that night she swept the back yard fast and furiously, and the next next—and the night—then she stood once more in the midst of us and discharged a bomb-shell directly into the hearts of the children who loved her. To her credit be it said that the bomb-shell

plowed as deeply into her own tender soul as into ours.

"It cyarn be holped, Mist'ess," she began without preamble ; "I'se 'bleeged t' go too. I'se ben studyin' 'bout it tell I done turn ag'in' my vittles ; but I cyarn stay behin' w'en my ol' man en Prince en 'Tildy done gone. De cabin's so lonesome uv nights, Mist'ess, dat de buzzin' uv de 'skeeters soun's as loud as de quarter-bell ringin' fur gittin'-up time. My heart 's jes' tore'd in two, but I'se 'bleeged to go."

Nature triumphed, and Mammy went. Her going gave us an opportunity to learn how elastic the human heart is, and how quickly young lives can be readjusted to new conditions. In those eventful days so much happened out of routine that men and women comforted themselves somewhat like surf-bathers, bracing themselves anew for each inevitable billow as it rolled toward them in quick succession and irresistible force. So it was that the grief created by Mammy's going was soon whelmed in greater grief for the cutting short of fresh young lives, and when the billows ceased to roll and the long sullen calm of despair settled over the lives of those she had left behind her, we had grown used to the vacant chair in the nursery and to the absence of her busy ministrations, and sorrowed for her in a chastened fashion.

The war was over, and the heads of our diminished household were busy in the task of reconstruction.

Not that broad political reconstruction that involved a sudden and violent declaration of universal brotherhood or a cordial acceptance of startling social-equality theories, but the pathetic reconstruction of a



home from the scattered *débris* of a wreck. The task was a weary one. We younger members felt our own inadequacy in those days that called for tactful heads and skillful hands, while we had nothing but willing hearts to offer.

Through three seasons the China-trees in the back yard had tapped the nursery windows with their swinging purple censers and the plum-trees had shed their fragrant snow upon the brown earth of the orchard since that spring morning when Mammy had told us with tears in her voice that the Lord had laid His hand heavily upon her, when she walked quietly among us again—not bowed with sorrow and torn with conflicting emotions, as when we had last seen her, but with her head proudly erect and a new look in her eyes which we had to learn how to interpret. It was Mammy, and it wasn't Mammy. In place of the familiar blue plaid dress, with its unmatched plaids, she was clad in rusty silk that found no favor in our eyes. The conical turban had been displaced by a bonnet of insignificant proportions which had an incurable propensity to retreat to the nape of her neck. But after all it was only Mammy in a new case. It took her a very short while to convince us that she had brought us back the same unselfish heart and the same pure, wholesome, loyal nature.

"I'se come home t' live en die, Mist'ess," she said, placidly untying the bonnet-strings that threatened strangulation. "I done my duty by my ol' man t' de las'. He's safe in glory, en Prince, he's a barbering in Vicksburg. Tildy, she's married; don't ax me no mo' 'bout her. An', Mist'ess"—here to our intense

amazement Mammy brought forth a brand-new pocket-book and displayed its crisp contents proudly—"yere's my ol' man's bounty. I hates to 'fess it, but arter he come into freedom 'it seemed t' cure his rheumatiz, en he med a tol'able fightin' sold'er, dey tell me ; leastways dey pay me up his bounty money lak gentlemens ; en, Mist'ess, as soon es I git it, I say to myseff, dar, now, nigger, you kin go home and holp Mist'ess en Marster out 'n a tight place. It's yourn, honey, ef you'll have it. I save mos' all of 'it fer you en de chillun."

And she does help us out of many a "tight place," but not with her "old man's bounty money."

## CHAPTER XII.

### A BREEZY OPTIMIST.

NOTHING would have quicker excited a burst of that deep-lunged, infectious laughter from the broad chest of "the General," for which he is famous all over his State, than to hear himself called "a public benefactor." It is without design on his part, or suspicion of the fact, that he is one. His breezy laughter is itself sufficient to dissipate the megrims from the most melancholy, and one cordial grip of his shapely hand is sufficient to increase a man's bump of self-esteem for an indefinite period of time. His universal cheerfulness and persistent optimism are somewhat trying to those of his neighbors who are biliously bent upon considering that the country has gone to the dogs beyond hope of redemption, but they act as buoys to those easily depressed souls who are quite willing to look on the bright side of things if some one will kindly relieve them of the trouble of finding the bright side for themselves. Those who maintain that the liver is the seat of good temper give the General no credit for his broad charity, his open-handed generosity, or his optimistic tendencies. They are the natural and inevitable consequences of a liver in good working order.

If it is true, as Emerson says, that "the true test of civilization is not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops, but the kind of *man* the country turns out," then a high order of civilization might be inferred from such a product as the General. Although his voice has been heard in the legislative halls of his State, and he makes his home in cities, nature seems to have stamped her own manufacturer's mark all over his imposing person. The fresh breath of country meadows seems to exhale from his sound lungs, which have never known the defilement of tobacco or strong drink. The elastic vigor of the chamois is in the vigorous limbs he exercises with contemptuous independence of wind or weather. The clearness of crystal lakes is in his great limpid eyes. The russet of Nature's autumn tints is on his bronzed and ruddy cheeks, and her sunshine floods his heart. No one ever thinks of applying the adjective "handsome" to the General. He is simply big and breezy and healthy, and when you have been with him a little while you feel as one does on raising a window in some heated room to let in a whiff of fresh air. He leaves behind him a sense of physical refreshment, pleasant even if transient. He traces his own physical strength back to the days when he used to ride to mill every Saturday with a bag of grist before him on the saddle, and when he was a sort of amphibious biped, spending about as much time in the water of the pebbly creek that cut his father's plantation in two as he did on shore. The General is a man of fluctuating fortunes, and has experienced the sensation of "being broke" several times in a long and speculative career. But

looking back, he can date an improved condition of his affairs from each disaster. There is a good deal of comfort in being an optimist. He was born into the purple—that is (in the vernacular), to a planter's life of ease and security—but his powers of expansion were too great for him to remain in the purple without straining that royal garment badly at the seams. If his lot had been cast in Gotham, instead of in an obscure agricultural region, he would have become a conspicuous figure on Wall Street; but that vent for speculative genius being denied him, his talents expended themselves in safer channels, with varying results, through the medium of which he has found himself at different periods of his life the richest and the poorest man of his own acquaintance.

His belief in a glorious future of his own State is not to be shaken by facts or figures. Many a poor tax-burdened owner of wild lands has had cause to rejoice in this sublime faith of the General's. He has the courage of his convictions, and has bought up these wild lands as a speculation, until his tax-list is something stupendous to contemplate. Only an infinitesimal proportion of these lands are tillable or make any returns, but he pays taxes on them all with the comforting conviction that some of these days he will get it all back tenfold.

It is delightful to hear him demonstrate, with what sounds like irrefragable arguments, the brilliant future that *must*, in the march of events, come to that section of the South. He will convince you (unless you are word-proof) that you will yet see a network of railroads where now you only see dense woods in which

the "razor-back" hogs root for mast and luxuriate on the frost-sweetened persimmon ; that the shabby little river-side town, which now boasts its three shops devoted to miscellaneous stock and its drug store and post-office all in one, within a decade or two, will expand into a mart that shall make St. Louis at one end and New Orleans at the other tremble for their commercial laurels. With the positiveness of a seer he will tell you of the mineral wealth lying imprisoned within the soil of his native State, only awaiting the open sesame of the capitalist to make the fortune of the poorest and meanest among the dwellers over these hidden beds of iron and coal ; and whether or not any of the General's gorgeous prophecies shall ever be fulfilled, perhaps no one will ever be the worse for thinking that such pleasant and desirable things might befall.

The General would be invaluable as an immigrant agent for his state, for without doing any violence to his conscience, which is as clean and nice a conscience as ever dwelt in a man's breast, he could and would paint things so glowingly that the restless and dissatisfied of every clime would flock to his El Dorado of the future in eager swarms. Not that the General is consciously given to word-painting, or that he would lead a lamb astray purposely ; but, seen through the medium of his hopeful disposition and shown by him in that rosy tint with which he invests every possibility his cheerful imagination entertains, nothing but the desirable points in any venture acquire prominence.

No calamity is ever purely a calamity in his estimation. If there is a rift in the cloud-racks that shut the sun out from every other eye, he will detect the rift

and be the first one to predict the return of the sunshine. Overflows, of which he has had repeated experience, are simply blessings in disguise, if only men were wise enough to see it so. The deposit of alluvium left by the receding waters is "just what the land needs, and it is never healthier in the county than in over-flow years." He admits that it is rather rough on the stock, and the owners of the stock too, but if men would stop leveeing and making vain and costly experiments to keep the river within bounds, which he is positive can not be done, and would put all that dirt and labor into the erection of mounds, to save the cattle on in high water, an over flow would be a thing to be encountered with philosophic composure. If the General could have had his way, there never would have been any rupture of the Union. Each party would have minded its own business and every body would have gone on being serene and happy, according to the dictates of his own individual conscience, but since the irrepressible conflict came to a climax and relieved him of the responsibility of several scores of slaves, he is convinced that it is the best thing that could possibly have happened for the country, and now she will have an opportunity to show what her resources are, which invariably brings the genial optimist back to the supposed mineral resources under his feet. No public enterprise of any description is ever undertaken in his neighborhood without being submitted to his good sound judgment. His optimism does not interfere with the calmness of his views, and his opinion always carries weight with it, although the recipient may deem it necessary to make some allowances for his sanguine way of look-

ing at things. His name generally heads the list of any and every subscription that may be started, without any undue curiosity on his part as to the worthiness of the object. He would rather give relief to an unworthy object than risk overlooking a worthy one. That he is often taken in, needs not to be said.

The General's home is the exponent of himself. It is big and breezy and solidly comfortable. There are no stiff chairs to be found under its shingled roof, or any formal reception rooms to appall the visitor with a sense of the owner's local importance or his own social inferiority. It laughs with good cheer as the General laughs with good-humor. There are flowers all around it and within it. Individually he prizes a fine asparagus bed or a thrifty showing of burr artichoke bushes far above the costly roses and orchids his "women folks" are perpetually experimenting in; but whatever gives pleasure to the weaker sex has fully vindicated its own worthiness in his eyes. He is a lover of fine horses and a good judge of them. He seldom submits to the confinement of the family coach, but on occasions when he appears in public with his "folks," it is generally in the character of an imposing and well-mounted outrider. His stables are never so full of harness or saddle-horses but that room can be found for one more in case a "trader" should stop in town with a fine lot of animals from the blue-grass stock farms of Kentucky. Whether he purchases or not, so long as the horse-trader is within reach, so long may the General be seen in the neighborhood of his stables, either complacently tilted back in a splint-bottomed chair on the outside of the stables, passing



judgment on each animal as it is trotted or paced or walked up and down the dusty road for his inspection, or negotiating a "swap," as much for the sake of novelty as for any thing else. The General likes frequent change of style, but the horses must all be big and strong, with good staying powers, for he travels over many miles of rough country road, superintending the interests of several plantations and a cotton-seed oil mill, of which he is one of the owners, and the erection of some cottages on some of his town lots, and dear knows what else. He has a great many irons in the fire.

Some one has said, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are." This would be an unusually difficult undertaking in the General's case. He feeds more in accord with the substantial baronial banqueting notions of merrie old England than within prescribed modern limits. He has nothing but scoffing laughter and words of scorn for people who are conscious of their digestive organs. A mere description of one of his breakfasts, especially in the winter season, would throw a dietist into a fit of dyspepsia. No gruelly compounds for him. No oatmeal or cracked wheat—"brain-feeders"—find place on his handsome table damask. At that meal will be the General's wife, sitting behind the big tray on which glistens the old silver coffee service that her mother began house-keeping with. Looming conspicuously among the cups and saucers around her will be one huge cup brilliantly ornamented and protected with a mustache fender. That is the General's own. It holds twice as much as any of the others, and will perhaps be replen-

ished more than once, for it requires a liberal amount of the rich dark fluid that comes in a clear stream from the spout of the old silver coffee-pot to wash down the fried ham, boiled squab, Welsh rabbit, fried corn, hot rolls, and griddle-cakes, submerged in "syro de batterie" which go to form his usual morning rations. Perhaps it is well for the liver, which is presumed to be the fountain-seat of all his geniality, that before he shall have finished breakfast "Charlie," his great gray gelding, with the dapples all over his shining flanks, will be brought to the front door saddled for his morning tour of the fields. It never occurs to him that this open-air exercise is of vital importance to him physically. His meals are never wholesome or unwholesome; they are simply palatable, enjoyable or otherwise.

He will tell you he has no time for reading, notwithstanding which, if you should happen to call at his house of a pleasant afternoon, you will find him comfortably dozing in the hammock on his front gallery, while the floor around him will be carpeted with all the weeklies and as many dailies as can be procured before their contents become absolutely flat, stale and unprofitable. He is conversant with the current affairs of all the civilized globe, but as for literature *per se*, he leaves that to his women folks, and is reprehensibly ignorant on the subject of all the novelists who have risen in his own time and strutted their taper-lighted way into the limbo of the forgotten without attracting a moment's notice from him. "Life's too short to keep up with them all," he says, with cheerful resignation to his own ignorance.

Lest you should fall into the grave error of coming to think of the General as nothing more or better than a well-fed, good-tempered animal, his "affair" must be put on record. No one ever speaks of it in his presence. He is no swaggerer, no boaster, and where a smaller man might take pleasure in telling of his own prowess, he maintains a simple and manly reticence. Some one did once undertake to chaff him on his affair, but one look from his blazing eyes shriveled the flippant words like burned paper. But his friends like to repeat the story.

Among the many irons that have at various times kept the General on active duty was a newspaper once, of which he was proprietor, but not editor. As proprietor he held himself personally responsible for all that went into its columns. This responsibility has assumed a very grave complexion on more than one occasion, notably in the case which resulted in the affair in question. A braggart of doubtful antecedents and more than doubtful record took umbrage at something that appeared in the paper for which the General stood sponsor. A vast volume of fire and smoke (more of the latter, doubtless, than of the former) was kindled by this little matter. The whole concern was threatened with annihilation, and the editor, who was physically rather a meager specimen, trembled in his brown cloth gaiters, or would have done so if the General had not promptly and decisively taken the whole matter on his own broad shoulders. The insulted party breathed forth fiery threats of vengeance with such vehemence that the General's friends besought him to be on his guard. He laughed

his cheeriest into their concerned faces, but consented to burden himself with a pistol, which he carried in his capacious hip pocket. He was seen oftener than usual in the places where his antagonist would most likely be found, but without ever encountering him. It was only through report that he could tell whether or not the fires of his wrath showed any signs of burning themselves out. Report told him that outraged virtue was still on the "rampage." So long as that was the case the General's hip-pocket continued to bulge. He had begun to grow bored with the whole affair, when, sauntering by a public-house on one of the main streets, he heard a note of excited warning hurled into his ears from a man on the opposite side of the street, simultaneously with the whizzing sound of a bullet that passed through the crown of his soft felt hat. With the swiftness of an enraged tiger he faced about in time to see the man who had tried to shoot him in the back leap behind a sheltering tree-box that gave him a temporary advantage. The General's hip-pocket no longer bulged. No one could tell how he managed it, for it was all done before the nearest loafer, running at his greatest speed, could get to the spot. When he did get there, it was to see the swaggerer prone on the sidewalk, where he was pinned by one of the General's substantial knees. His loaded pistol was in his right hand. He had never touched the trigger. Patiently, wordlessly, only showing his appreciation of the cowardliness of the attack by his blazing eyes and short, quick breathing, he held his would-be murderer until a crowd had gathered about them ; then he addressed him in a voice that

trembled a little from passion in spite of him : " I could have killed you, and you know it. You know you deserve it, too, for the earth would be rid of a cowardly scoundrel if I did. I've kept you here to make you beg my pardon before all these people for every thing you've said, and for what you tried to do just now. After you've begged my pardon you've got to acknowledge before all these people that the paragraph you've been playing the bully over was true to the minutest particular. After you've done that, you can go." Lifting his conquered foe to his feet by a firm grip on his collar, not without shaking him slightly, very much as he might have shaken a puppy rescued from drowning, he restored his own weapon to his pocket, pulled his waistcoat carefully down over his portly person, and calmly awaited the issue. It was all that the most exacting could demand in shape of an apology, at the close of which the General turned from the gaping crowd with a contemptuous exclamation and then walked rapidly away, anxious to reach his home in advance of any disagreeable rumors. On the way he met a little crying child. It was too young to convey any more information than that it was lost. In his great strong arms he lifted it up, and holding it close to the breast that had just been heaving with the hottest passions that can stir the human pulse, he soothed its terror and told it to point to home. Following the tiny index finger, he presently found himself once more face to face with his foe as he reached a certain gate, through which the dust-begrimed and crestfallen man was hurrying with down-dropped head, and hearing

so withdrawn from what was passing around him, that the child in the General's arms lisped the name of "father" several times in the eager joy of recognition before he raised his sullen face to see his baby infolded softly in the arms that had just closed with him in a struggle for life and death. It was rather a disagreeable surprise to the General, who, not caring to prolong the discomfort of the situation for the other man, hastily put the child on its wayward little feet and withdrew much more precipitately than he would have done perhaps if the muzzle of a pistol had been again pointed at his back.

But it is not through the medium of such disagreeable occurrences that the General has come to be regarded, locally, as a sort of unlaureled hero. It is because of his universal readiness to fling himself into a breach wherever found, and his absolute self-possession under the most trying emergencies, that men place such implicit confidence in him. What if his tendency to paint things *couleur de rose* does sometimes beguile him from the severe line of rigid veracity into the flowery by-paths of hyperbole? When strong facts are demanded he can furnish his full share of them.

Where women are concerned the General has absolutely no stamina. A lisping girl child can win her way with him as readily as a shrew of advanced years. The weakness of the sex appeals to his strength, their helplessness to his magnanimity, and that is why the General's wife has just cause of complaint concerning piles of useless books and incongruous trifles that are scattered about her handsome parlors, bought by the

General from agents who were "women, poor things," and he could easier face a cannon than say "no" to woman or child.

In the leading Episcopal church of his town the General has a pew for which he pays a high rental. The list of names of subscribers to the minister's salary is headed by his. Churches are good things to patronize. They are conservators of the peace. Whatever appeals to him in the interest of good citizenship is sure of ready and substantial support, but he has an outspoken horror of creeds and creedsmen. He does not believe that the Almighty Maker of the earth, which he has found such a pleasant abiding-place, can possibly be meditating vengeance against a lot of insignificant worms, who are no more to Him than the motes in a ray of sunshine; but he does believe that there is mercy and comfort somewhere for whosoever acts well his part here below, bearing in mind that to so act one must go out liberally, helpfully, unselfishly to those who stumble by the way. So far as in him lies he is his brother's keeper, and if the world furnishes thousands of a nobler type of manhood than the General's, it undoubtedly furnishes tens of thousands of a poorer type.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### LEE'S WIFE.

**I**F it has ever been your fortune to be traveling down South, through one of those exclusively agricultural districts which, in the very order of things, preclude the existence of towns, let us say within the limits of Arkansas, and have found yourself on one bank of the swift-running Mississippi River, with no visible means of transportation to the other, and have been moved to inquire of the nearest native how you are to proceed on your way, the native, in nine cases out of ten, will instruct you to "holler across," or, more probably, will affably undertake to do your "hollering" for you. Until then, perhaps, your untrained eye had discovered nothing on the other side of the river but a dense wall of foliage of graduated greens, from the pale tender shade of the foot-high shrubs that stand ankle-deep in the muddy water of the river, on and up through larger growths and darker greens, until the universal cottonwood that clothes the uncultivated shores achieves the dignity of the sapling and stands in serried ranks, tall, slim, symmetrical, useless. But closer and more purposeful inspection will show you a break in the woods—a sort of three-sided opening, in which are a few acres of roughly cleared land, surrounded by a fence whose



component parts are pleasingly indistinct at that distance, a tiny little cabin, with a chimney of sticks and mud, through which thin blue smoke is escaping heavenward—but no boat.

If you are by nature opposed to violent exercise, or have had any experience of "hollering across," you will prefer tipping one of the natives to straining your own incompetent lungs. The judicious display of a "four-bit" piece or the timely production of a piece of plug tobacco will induce the native to give voice in your behalf for an unlimited length of time. While listening to the melody of a stentorian "Who-pee—who-pee, who-o-o-pe-e-e, fetch on yo' boat," launched from a perfect pair of lungs, through a capacious mouth, barricaded by a couple of huge horny black hands to prevent the air-sown sound from being dissipated, you will perhaps keep your eyes fixed on the little clearing opposite, in anxious speculation concerning the probable whereabouts of the harbor or the possibility of that unearthly yell evoking a boat and a boatman from the leaves and the twigs of the cottonwoods. The "who-pees" (rising inflection) may have to be multiplied indefinitely to suit wind and weather, but the man on the other side is perhaps far more anxious to ferry you over than you are to be ferried, and when your human telephone cuts a final yell neatly in two, substituting for the last syllable a relieved "dar now," you rashly take it for granted that the period of waiting is almost over. The native will unintentionally help on this delusion by the cheerful but unfounded assertion: "You's all right now, boss. He done answer back. I'lows I'll go back to my plow-

in'," with which he leaves you, after gratefully pocketing his hard-earned fee.

If you take his word for it that you are all right, and keep your gaze fixed steadily on the clearing opposite, you will presently see what looks like an insignificantly small boy saunter leisurely down to the water's edge with a pair of oars on his shoulders at a point where the foliage seems densest. He is a mile distant from you, and therefore has no means of judging of your state of mind. If he knew what a "staving" hurry you were in, he might possibly consent to "hustle up" a little. But the people who "holler across" for him are rarely ever in special haste to get to any given point, and it is impossible for him to divine at that distance, either from the cut of your coat or the savage displeasure of your countenance, that you are not old Squire Rogers, or Colonel Ransom, or any of that lot of the initiated who read their papers, or whittle boats out of the bark of the fallen trees they occupy patiently while waiting, or serenely smoke the mosquitoes away during the interim, or amuse themselves otherwise. Amusing yourself is purely optional; the waiting is not. If you are new to the business, you will find some relief in speculatively watching the deliberate motions of the small boy after he has flung his oars into the boat, which you can outline now against the woody-background. His deliberation is novel in your experience and trying to your equanimity. You had rashly supposed that, given a man, a boat, a pair of oars, and the intimation of an expectant traveler on t'other side, some signs of immediate progress might not unreason-

ably be looked for. If you are not new to the business, you will understand the groping attitude assumed by your ferryman after he has leisurely dispossessed himself of coat and vest, with neatness but not with dispatch. He is groping for something to "bail her out with." She stands chronically in need of being bailed out. Perhaps there is an empty lobster can or an untrustworthy tin basin under the seats somewhere. The basin is pretty sure to leak, but a rag torn from some part of his own apparel will readily correct that. He would have bailed her out the first thing in the morning if he had been sure of a call, but, in view of the facility with which she fills up again, it would have been time and labor thrown away on the mere chance of a passenger. It is some relief to your overwrought feelings, finally, to hear the clank of a chain, softened by the distance, by token of which you know that the little boat has actually slipped her moorings and is heading for the bank where you are chafing in impotent rage.

When town calls unto town across the "Big Muddy" the call may be answered by a fussy little "side-wheeler," which will ply from one side of the river to the other at stated periods, and with great ado over the task, sighing asthmatically, puffing fretfully, at each quick revolution of its small wheels, sending a shrilly querulous whistle ahead of it by a few rods to give notice of its eventful arrival. As a rule, the dingier the craft the more imposing the nomenclature, and if an "Empress" should be debased to transporting Texas beeves to market, or "Queen Titania" so fallen from her high estate as to be a fetcher and car-

rier of man and beast, it is to be regarded as an indication of local prosperity. But the exigencies of the traveling public in the rural districts do not warrant so luxurious a medium of transit save occasionally; hence the necessity for the hollering, the waiting, and all the rest of it.

If, when the privilege of seating yourself in the long-awaited-for boat is finally yours, you are at all disconcerted by the exceeding wetness of the false floor under your feet, or by a certain sloppy sound beneath it, as the little skiff rolls slightly under the combined agencies of a stiff current and a pair of vigorously wielded oars, one look at the composed face of your ferryman will reassure you completely. Moreover, there is always the tin basin with its damp plug of white domestic. What more would you?

Your ferryman (who by the way is no boy at all, but a stalwart young man) will not initiate the talk, but you will find him responsive in his stolid fashion, and if before you separate you do not know as much as he does about the topography, geology, society, and politics of the county to which he is rapidly conveying you, the fault will be yours, not his. He is like a full well whose contents will not be brought to the surface voluntarily, but will promptly respond to the touch on the windlass. You can turn the windlass industriously without impeding the swift progress of the skiff. Your ferryman will talk as he rows, with unconscious strength and directness of aim, but with seeming indifference to the outcome. In return for much valuable information you may thus obtain gratuitously, it will go hard with him if he does not "size you up"

before he parts with you in front of the little log-cabin he calls home, and satisfy himself without a word of direct inquiry whether you are a real-estate speculator come to look after a plantation that somebody is anxious to rid himself of, or a commission merchant alarmed about the prospect of getting back his "advances," or an itinerant preacher engaged to preach in Mackey's empty storehouse next Sunday, or a fellow who professes to have discovered a dead-sure poison for cotton-worms, and is going to make a free experiment on somebody's crops. To you, the product of a city, perhaps, he, with his broad shoulders, slouching gait, bronzed face, keen, quick, glancing eye (as is the manner of eyes trained to woodcraft); with his slow-coming smile and imperturbable composure, seems but a degree removed mentally from the creatures of the dark woods that crowd so closely up about his unpainted cabin; to him you, with your bleached skin, and trim apparel, and slender wrists, and rigid neckwear, and buttoned shoes, and general suggestiveness of dependence upon the conveniences and comforts of a high order of civilization, seem but a feeble exponent of the strength of body, freedom of action, and absolute independence of custom that constitute his conception of manliness. Perhaps your conception of the higher possibilities his life might contain will lead you to waste much silent pity on him. There is a shrewdness of observation, a conciseness of expression, and an indication of good common-sense about him that leads you into idle speculation as to what he might have been, if accident of birth had located him differently. He never wastes time him-

self in any such absurd fashion. There is too much to be done for that ; and in his own unhurrying way he gets through daily with what he considers momentous jobs.

The little clearing, which grows ruder in effect as you approach it more nearly ; with the stubble of last year's corn-crop still standing in the ragged two-acre field ; with its fence of old rails pieced out here with a fallen tree, there with a lot of refuse from the drift-wood pile ; with the tumble-down chicken-house, and the close proximity of the pig-pen to the one window of the cabin ; with the ornate white front door to the house (fished from the river) contrasting curiously with the cypress boards that environ it : is a home to him in every sense of the word, and about and around the ragged fields and the absurd cabin they inclose, hover the ministering spirits of love and peace, clad in homespun, perhaps, and faring unsumptuously, but very real for all that. If you are a stranger, you will stare curiously at seeing the ornate front door, with its incongruous silver-plated knob, open briskly when the ferryman flings his oars down with a clatter in the bottom of the boat, and offer to your view a young woman. She is plump and pretty, and looks neat, but not stylish, with that great hideous calico sun-bonnet coming far over her face. She will never outlive her curiosity concerning the people who cross. The sound of the boat's chain being flung round the sapling is sure to bring her to the door, with that good-natured free stare of hers. If you are not a stranger, you will need no one to tell you that the plump young woman in the calico sun-bonnet is "Lee's wife," only an

adjunct, you perceive, of your stalwart ferryman. No one ever calls her any thing but Lee's wife, but in that connection Lee's name has had a halo of heroism cast about it which it would never otherwise have obtained. She does not look heroic as she stands there with her sleeves rolled up above her elbows, with a half-pared potato in one hand and a case-knife in the other, staring frankly at you as you toil through the heavy sand of the bank toward the cabin, and she would grow ruddier than it is in the power of her kitchen stove to make her if any one should call her a heroine. She is quite content to be only Lee's wife. "Lee and me" constitute the world in her estimation.

If by the time you reach the cabin door you have become convinced of the folly of being in a "staving hurry" about any thing in a part of the country where every thing animate and inanimate opposes a superfluous display of energy, you will wisely accept Lee's invitation to "stop and have a bite," the more readily after learning that you have a three-mile walk through the forest that crowds close up about the little clearing before reaching any other sign of habitation. You need not be deterred from accepting this invitation through gastronomic qualms. The repast which Lee's wife will spread for you on a little table set up against the cabin wall under its one window will be the very best of its kind, and prepared with a religious regard for cleanliness. From the crown of her stiff-starched sun-bonnet down to the shuck mat in front of the door, upon which Lee performs a formal foot-cleansing ceremonial before each entrance, she is an apostle of tidiness, but as she is opposed to having "men

folks loafing 'round " unnecessarily, Lee will invite you to a seat on a cypress block under the spreading arms of a huge sycamore behind the cabin, where is a great litter of cypress splinters and bark, and shingles that he makes in primitive fashion with a draw-knife.

If you have grown philosophically indifferent to the engagement which it is now utterly impossible for you to keep, you will drowsily enjoy sitting there under the great sycamore, watching the shining blade of the draw-knife in Lee's strong brown hands as it glides into the rough-hewn cypress block (behind which he sits astride of another block) and slices off shingle after shingle of accurately uniform thickness with marvelous celerity. There is something soporific in the intense quietness of your surroundings; nothing more violent than the grunt of content which the pig that Lee's wife is fattening for Christmas, in the pen under the cabin window, sends up in acknowledgment of the potato parings that have fallen like manna at his feet; or the meditative sing-song of a hen leisurely prospecting the premises for a desirable laying-place; or the music of the coffee-mill that Lee's wife is turning with brisk regularity, or the distant sound of paddle-wheels churning the river around the bend just below disturbs it. You can see the black column from the steamer's smoke-stack rising above the green heads of the cotton-woods. It's "the packet," Lee will inform you, and her coming is a semi-weekly event which makes the faintest possible ripple in the placid current of his life, for it may be that Lee has sent to the city for a new saddle for himself, or a pair of rocking-chairs for the cabin, or a "whole " half-barrel



of sugar, which Lee's wife has pronounced truer economy than buying by "the small" of the local tradesman. But whether she is to land or not, the draw-knife will come to a stand-still, and Lee's head will be turned lazily over his shoulder to watch the great white palpitating mass glide swiftly in and out of sight, and Lee's wife will come to the door again and follow its graceful movements with brightly interested eyes, and both of them will feel the faintest possible accession of interest in the world to which it links them.

Unless you are exceptionally unapproachable, it is not likely Lee will lose the golden opportunity of telling the story of his wife's heroism to a new listener. He is very proud of her pluck, and as his egotism takes the shape of singing her praises, it leans to virtue's side and is quite endurable. He will tell it to you plainly and slowly, but veraciously, and it will enhance your interest in the little brown-eyed woman who is singing over the biscuit-tray in the cabin yonder. Perhaps, that is if you are very susceptible, it will give a different flavor to the rather conglomerate noon-day meal of fried fish preserves, hot biscuit, coffee, and butter-milk to which she will presently summon you with her friendly unembarrassed smile.

This is the story Lee, the ferryman, is so fond of telling :

"It waren't a matter of choice with me that I was outer the way at that pertickular junchoor—it never is of my own choosin' when I stop away all night from the cabin, for it's a lonesome sorter place 'cording to some folks' notions, and women-folks are apt to grow

fanciful when the sun goes down and the shadows crowd black around every corner until the very leghopper by the chimbley 'ill give 'em a start if they happen t' look toward it after dark. Then the owls helps along the shivers some. It ain't cheerful music they make a hootin' at each other in these old woods every night. Blamed if I don't think sometimes that Nannie (nodding proudly toward the cabin) has got the grit of forty wild-cats to stand it 't all.

"I had to go prospecting for timber that day. I'd took out a contract to furnish 20,000 boards to cover Squire Moore's new gin house with, and I've cut 'way mos' of the cypress clost to my field—I've turned off a sight of shingles since I settled in this bottom—and that day I laid off to find my trees and blaze 'em and then get home by lamp-light. Nannie didn't look like she relished the prospeck much, but she ain't the sorter woman to make you feel like a criminal every time you get out of her sight, so she put me up enough col' vittles in a tin bucket to last me a week 'stead of for one col' snack and walked part of the way with me, to the blackberry patch down by the gin slough. Nan's death on blackberry jam. I'll bet you four bits she gives you some for dinner. Blackberries were uncommon fine and plentiful that year. I ushully tuk my gun 'long with me, and I've never been able to 'count for my not doing it on that pertickuler occasion. Nothing wouldn't have happened as it did if I'd a had my gun with me. But I reckon it was just as well as it was, for otherwise Nannie 'd never had no chance to show her pluck. Well, sir, it ain't often that house of ours has to look out for

itself mos' half a day, but what with the blackberries and Nannie not being overly anxious to get back to her lonesomeness, it did that day.

“ There used to live up on Squire Moore's place a darky named Tim Walker that 'ud far liever steal a thing than have it give him ; and as luck would have it, he come down that morning to go crost to Roberson's saw-mill. Seeing nobody about, it waren't a very difficult matter for him to h'ist the shutter off its hinges (it was hooked inside and the door was locked with the key in Nannie's josy pocket), git inside, and help himself to my shot-gun that always stands in the corner of the room behind the bed. Nannie says when she got in sight of home and saw that shutter a swinging loose from its hinges she knew Old Nick was to pay, and she run every step of the way, strawing the road with blackberries as she run. The first thing she done when she got inside was to spy for my gun ; it was 'bout the most valuable piece of furniture we owned, and when she saw it was gone she just gave one jump out of that door to look for tracks. She found 'em too. Lucky for us it had been raining day before, and the wet ground showed her mighty plain the thief had made tracks for the boat-landing. I had two skifts then, the new one—I fetched you over in that—and the old one ; that's the skeleton of it high and dry ; it answers first-rate to salt the cattle in. The new one was gone when Nannie got to the bank, and as a thick fog was blanketing the river there waren't no means of finding out how much the start of her the thief had got with my gun ; but she didn't waste no time in calkerlatin' that row er figgers. She run

back to the house to get somethin' to bail the old boat out with, and for the extra oars I always keeps hung up to the rafters, and out she put across the river on the track of that thief. I've heard her tell time and again of how awful she felt when she got out in that white fog and couldn't see nor hear nor feel any thing but fog. Nannie says it was just like being in the world before there was any thing at all made—just a universal whiteness and stillness and lonesomeness, nothing in existence but her alone a rowing away so feeble like. And after a little she lost her bearings; she could tell by the current whether she was pullin' up stream or down, but whether she was pullin' for this shore or the opposite one was too much for her to say. But she was certain of one thing, and that was that she had to keep a rowin', and she did. Nanny says once she heard a sound of hammerin', like sledges on hollow iron, and then she remembered Squire Moore's boiler was being patched, so she must be pullin' straight for home (Squire lives just back of us here); so she pulled roun' on one oar and struck out, as well as she could make it, away from the sound. Nanny says, if the fog'd a-raised for a minute, so she could a-seen one shore or t'other, she'd a had more heart, but she pulled for all there was in them plucky little arms er hers, until she heard another noise—this time it was sorter blood-curdling; it was the packet coming down, snorting and ripping; fog makes sounds awful loud; she could hear the big wheels just tearing things wide open; she could hear 'em shoveling coal into the furnace, and she made up her mind to it that her chances

of being walked over out there in that white fog was the best in the world, for as big and as loud as they was to her, she warn't nowheres to them.

“ If the fog would just lift long 'nough for her to see which way that boat was a headin'! Nannie says she begun to think she'd set a sight more store by that gun of mine than it was worth. The fog did lift, just the least little blowin' aside of it, like a woman's veil in the wind; just long enough to give her one glimpse. Two more strokes of the oars, and she would have been smack under her bow. Nannie says she didn't make them two more strokes. The fog fell again presently, thicker 'n whiter than before, but she didn't mind it so much—she knew when the swell reached her that the packet was well out of the way, and then she began pulling again. Nannie says she got a sorter notion after while that there was another skift out in the fog, and she just jumped to the conclusion that it might be the man she was after. She says she pulled like a house afire after that, regularly racing with that other pair of oars; it was a queer feeling—following the sound without seeing anything. All of a sudden the fog lifted again, this time strong and good. She was near the other bank. Roberson's saw-mill was buzzin' away there at a great rate. There was a lot of fellers on the bank loading a flat with weather boarding, and there was—will you believe it, sir? that darky of Squire Moore's just pullin' up 'longside the flat in my new skift, 'crost the stern seat of which lay my gun. Nannie says she just stood up in the old skift and sent one yell ahead of her—‘Arrest that man’—and they nabbed him.

The rest was easy as fallin' off a log for a mud turtle. I jist told you the story to let you see what a game wife I've got in yonder. Nannie won't let me tell it before her. Come in to dinner."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### 'MELY JANE'S WEDDING.

'MELY JANE was about to be married ! The man, the day, and the dress were all selected. The fact that the wedding-dress was a second-hand silk belonging to the Miss Amelia whose Christian name, corrupted into "Mely," had been one of the bride-elect's earliest second-hand belongings, did not detract at all from its splendor in 'Mely Jane's estimation, since she had been taking life itself, with all its attendant circumstances, at second-hand, so to speak, from her earliest infancy,

It was through the instrumentality of a second-hand mother that 'Mely Jane had been transplanted from the quarters to the big house at the tender age of eight years, with a good deal of her native soil clinging to her, it is to be feared. By "second-hand mother" is meant the good-natured soul who rescued her from the cabin, where, by the death of her own mother, she had been relegated to the companionship of the cats and dogs that had full possession of the premises during her father's work hours. If 'Mely Jane had not flourished exactly like a green bay tree at the big house, she had at least shown the expansive powers of a thriving bronze-colored varnish tree. Her official duties and position at the big house

had varied with the years and with the changing requirements of its inmates. When first presented as a candidate for office by her second-hand mother, it was as somebody to amuse little Miss Amelia, and the all-potent Mammy who held sway over the big-house nursery was propitiated with a watermelon beforehand. Mammy's acknowledgment that "dat chile 'Meelie was gettin' too much fur her to foller 'roun' arter, wid two odder babies on her hands," had been the means of opening the gates of Paradise to 'Mely Jane. 'Mely Jane's second-hand mother set forth her eligibility for the office of playmate in glowing terms, so glowing that 'Mely Jane was summoned to the big house the next day on probation. Her qualifications, as reported to head-quarters, were that "she was rale peert, mouty quick on her legs, had never been known to steal as much as a lump of white sugar, an' did'n' hev' no low-live corn-fiel' nigger ways 'bout her."

When 'Mely Jane was brought in triumph to the house by her second-hand mother, who had starched her dress with the most reckless disregard for the quivering flesh it imprisoned, and arranged her head handkerchief in a manner that gave her three or four inches of factitious height, she was informed in the most peremptory manner that she was to "keep little Miss 'Meelie 'mused."

Little Miss 'Meelie had eyed her askance through the shock of yellow curls that defied Mammy and discipline, but gave no intimation whatever of her willingness to be amused. It was a trying moment to 'Mely Jane, but her accredited "peertness" carried her triumphantly through it.



"I'se gwine to play buryin', I is," she said tentatively, lifting her conical head-gear loftily in air. "I see two chicken heads a layin' des outside de kitchen winder as I come 'long, en' I pick 'm up fo' de dawgs git 'm. I'se gwine to hev a buryin', I is. Yhere dey." She lifted one corner of her clean blue check apron to show her gory prizes, thereby bringing down upon her Mammy's first lecture on the subject of bringing "sech truck" into the nursery. But little Miss 'Meelie's interest was aroused. It was an inspiration. The long hot summer afternoon was delightfully consumed in preparations for the august ceremonial of interment under the crape myrtle tree in the garden, and when 'Mely Jane's voice arose solemnly in the closing hymn, whose words were a curious blending of the pathetic and the comic, little Miss 'Meelie's capture was complete and 'Mely Jane's future was secure. The quarters knew her no more. And from that first night, when she made her pallet of a brand-new calico comfort on the floor of the nursery with a sense of immense material gain, up to the hour when she towered awkwardly above Miss Amelia as she arranged the wedding veil on 'Mely Jane's head with her own delicate hands, the tie formed at the "buryin'" under the myrtle tree had gone on strengthening with the years.

Every "big house" in the South has its "'Mely Jane," whose duties might be rather undefined, but were, none the less, multifarious. Beginning life as a sort of nursery supplement, the position had its pains and penalties as well as its pleasures and perquisites. It was her province to act as a willing scapegoat for

the shortcomings of the nursery charges, or a smiling safety-valve for the surcharge of temper that the head of the nursery could not eject in any other direction with impunity. As a fetcher and carrier she must achieve as near an approximation to ubiquity as is possible to flesh-hampered spirit. Perhaps no more onerous task might come into the day than the buttoning of a pair of boots on a restless and impatient little foot, or the unraveling of the string mystery attendant upon tiny petticoats, with all their perplexities of band and strap ; but the 'Mely Janes of the past shared with the children of the master the sense of awful subservience to the mammies of the past.

It was when little Miss Amelia was finally emancipated from the nursery that 'Mely Jane's existence took an additional importance and dignity and grew sweeter in every respect. It was with a protecting sense of physical superiority that she spread her pallet for the first time in the up-stairs bedroom which was from that time forth to be called "Miss Amelia's room." Nothing could have induced the white child to brave the vague terrors of the night after her exile from the nursery without the blessed assurance that 'Mely Jane was curled up on her blankets in front of the fire. What if 'Mely Jane did slumber with a soundness that would have rendered a surgical operation necessary to convey an idea into her double-locked senses? What if she was small and black and seemingly helpless? She made up in val'orous protestation what she lacked of being truly formidable, and little Miss Amelia was not hypercritical.

Such wonderful and improving conversations as were

held in that up-stairs bedroom between little mistress and little maid ! It was there and then that 'Mely reaped her best harvest of second-hand possessions. All the lessons that the white child absorbed during the day, from printed text-book or the cultured lips of her imported governess, were impressed at second hand orally, and with a greater or less degree of accuracy, upon the virgin soil of 'Mely Jane's brain, as she stood behind Miss 'Meelie's chair combing, smoothing, and braiding her yellow hair into decorous plaits for the night with a lingering touch, or else toyed affectionately with the little pink and white feet in the foot-bath, beside which she squatted in ungraceful abandonment, with an upward gaze of keen interest, if not always of ready comprehension, in her round black eyes. And the volumes of sage, moral aphorisms that were poured in one unceasing stream from the pure fountain of the white maiden's heart into the coarser receptacle of 'Mely Jane's undisciplined soul ; and the torturing requirements in the cause of good-manners, which she was pathetically adjured not to forget ! In return for all which, the mystic lore of the "Kunger woman," whose blood flowed in 'Mely Jane's shuddering veins, was retailed in a cheek-blanching monotone over the blazing wood fire in the up-stairs bedroom, until white maiden and black maid would turn their fear-distended eyes over their frightened shoulders, and start at the grotesque shadows their own crouching bodies cast on the fire-lighted walls. And 'Mely Jane would tell gruesome stories of her mammy, who was "daid," but possessed of an unrestful spirit that persisted in revisiting the quarters in the body of

a black cat with one green eye and one gray one ; or else the interim between undressing and retiring would be more prosaically beguiled by 'Mely Jane in roasting eggs wrapped up in wet newspapers, for her own midnight consumption, while Miss 'Meelie read aloud edifying but rather tiresome passages from her little Bible, which 'Mely Jane had a very poor opinion of, seeing it had no pictures in it. But it was not always night, and 'Mely Jane was not always acting as body-guard against depredators who never came. Miss 'Meelie's room was her special charge. The earliest flowers that grew in the sweet old tangled flower-garden, were for the vases on its mantel-piece, and the elder bushes and the dogwood yielded up their first blossoms to 'Mely Jane's insatiable quest. Her flowers were all votive offerings laid on the same shrine.

'Mely Jane's intimate association with "the quality" made her an object of unquenchable envy to the less fortunate dwellers in the quarter cabins, and when she would appear at meetin', proudly conscious of bearing a remote resemblance to Miss 'Meelie in so far as that resemblance could be perpetuated in frock, mantle or hat, she was the cynosure of all eyes. 'Mely Jane was an oracle in the quarters. No one could settle a vexed point of etiquette more authoritatively than she. Who could dispute a decision backed by the example of w'ite folks? When Aunt Milly wanted to know if it was "manners for Uncle Jake to come to her house of Sunday evenings and set and set till she's 'bleege to ax him in to supper, when he knowed she didn' hev no mo' vittles than 'nough for her ole man en the chilluns," and referred the question to 'Mely Jane,

'Mely Jane could find no big-house precedent for such a breach of the laws of hospitality, and sustained Aunt Milly in her threat of ejectionment "nex' time." When Sofy Ann was coyly hesitating as to the most elegant formula of acceptance known to polite society, 'Mely Jane was conjured to describe how Miss 'Meelie comported herself when her "beaux popped the question," and, mournful to relate, she was never appealed to in vain. When facts failed 'Mely Jane's fancy came promptly to the rescue, and Miss Amelia was utilized to adorn many a tale and point many a moral she knew not of.

'Mely Jane extracted much second-hand happiness out of the period of Miss Amelia's belleship. What close propinquity was hers to the fast-beating heart, and the softly blushing cheeks and the bright flashing eyes that told so much the mute lips denied her faithful ears? What need of words to impress 'Mely Jane when the acceptable one was ushered into the big cool parlor down stairs? Had they, she and Miss 'Meelie, grown up together side by side without learning to read each other's hearts as easily as the white maiden read the wonderful books which 'Mely Jane must always take on hearsay? Didn't 'Mely Jane know exactly who was expected when Miss Amelia sent her to the garden to bring the tea-rose buds from the bush by the asparagus bed? Hadn't she learned that that especial rose was consecrated to one purpose? And didn't she know just as well that Captain Hal Wilson was imminent when Miss Amelia was seized with those violent pains in her face that kept her shut up in the bedroom up stairs until the danger-signal was

lowered by 'Mely Jane's own faithful hand, as soon as the Captain's bob-tailed bays pranced out of sight? And 'Mely Jane grew subtle too. Where was the use of breathing the aristocratic atmosphere of the big house unless she could possess herself of some second-hand subtleties?

She did not apply that big word to her own conduct, either consciously or unconsciously, but she was of the opinion that "w'ite folks" were never in ungenteel haste, about accepting an offer of marriage; it "war'n't manners"; in consequence of which that humble and devoted adorer, Pete, who groomed Miss 'Meelie's riding horse and courted her maid with equal assiduity and regularity, got the full benefit of several well-rounded "Noes," while 'Mely Jane was calmly resolved upon an ultimate "Yes." The astonishment Peter evinced at the result of his carefully prepared proposals was precisely the effect 'Mely Jane had aimed at producing, and she reported progress placidly to Miss Amelia every night during those ministrations which still included the combing and brushing and plaiting of the pretty yellow hair, that was worn coronet-wise instead of in the breeze-blown curls that 'Mely Jane had coped with in the first years of her pleasant service.

'Mely Jane had privately determined on the time when she would substitute a final "Yes" for her oft-repeated "No." It would be when she should know positively that Miss Amelia and "Mars Jo's cousin, Mister Fred," for whom, only, the tea roses were ever culled, had had their last tiff and were finally minded to "jine han's an' lan's," as 'Mely Jane

phrased it. Then there wouldn't be any use of her holding out any longer. She regarded Miss Amelia's prospective husband as an interloper who would come between her and the dear form she had hovered over protectingly all these years. When Miss 'Meelie got married, then Pete might have his way. Not before. Nevertheless, there was a delicious excitement about Miss 'Meelie's "beauin' time" which 'Mely Jane enjoyed estatically at second hand. She would recount with pride for the benefit of an interested circle of quarter listeners how many horses had "chawed the horse-rack" during the past week, while their gallant riders paid court in the Holland-shaded parlor or on the vine-draped gallery to the prettiest girl in all the country side. 'Mely Jane was humbly convinced that her own flirtations and romances were but cheap imitations, scarcely worthy of mention in other tones than of ridicule. That was why, on a certain evening, when she stood behind Miss Amelia's chair carefully disentangling the thorns of the tea roses from their resting-place in her mistress's braids, 'Mely Jane began her confidence with a little contemptuous snort :

"Dat nigga Pete ben foolin' 'roun' yhere 'gin, Miss 'Meelie." Among her many second-hand acquirements 'Mely Jane did not include pure English. Her phraseology was as much her own as on the day she buried the chicken-heads under the myrtle tree. Miss Amelia made no comment on the fact that Peter was fooling around again ; she just put up her hand for the liberated rose-buds, and inhaled their dying fragrance, as she stared abstractedly out of the window over the moon-lighted field, and the tangled rose

garden, and all the other familiar objects she had grown up with. 'Mely gave another snort, and resumed :

" En I tol' 'm de fus' thing be know he would n' know nothin', pesterin' uv my life out. I say, go 'way, nigga, you fool 'nough 't' think I gwine marry any man 'bove groun' en leff Miss 'Meelie sleep her lone-seff up styars in dat room? Miss 'Meelie ain' never gwine say 'Mely Jane gone back on her, no surr."

" Pete's a good boy," Miss 'Meelie said, absently tearing the drooping rose-bud to pieces, " and, 'Mely Jane, if you want to get married, you can get married the night after I do. Papa's certain to have everybody on earth here, and there'll be enough left from the wedding supper for you to have a splendid party up in the quarters, so you may as well say, ' Yes ' to Pete next time. We, that is, papa and mamma and Mr. Fred, settled it all to-night."

And so, after ali, 'Mely Jane was to have a second-hand wedding. Nothing could have been more satisfactory for her or for Pete or for the quarter folks. Nothing at first-hand could have been half so gorgeous. 'Mely Jane's own approaching nuptials occupied but a limited portion of her thoughts during the week of delicious turmoil attendant upon the wedding at the big house. There was bedding to be aired, and ruffled pillow slips to be put on all the beds in all the spare rooms. There were lounges and cots to be cunningly devised in out-of-the-way nooks and corners of the old house. There were whole crates full of old and new china to be washed speckless and rubbed " shiny."



There was no end to the ducks and the turkeys and the chickens to be plucked. There were mountains of eggs to be beaten and rivers of cream to be whipped. There were whole boat-loads of imported delicacies from the "city" and "store-made" pyramids of nougat and spun-sugar to be handled carefully and admired enthusiastically. There was the unpacking of Miss 'Meelie's new trousseau from Olympe's, and the lavish selection of 'Mely Jane's second-hand wedding outfit from the full supplies in the wardrobes upstairs. Oh, it was a grand time for every body concerned, and the encomiums that were lavished, in good grammar, on Miss Amelia's new dresses from the city were lavished with equal heartiness, in bad grammar, on 'Mely Jane's, as they lay spread out for inspection, in the bridal chamber in Pete's house, whose furnishing had been Miss Amelia's own concern. 'Mely Jane shone with the reflected luster of the big house, and if on the night after the one that had seen all the country-side gathered under the big-house roof, the pyramids and iced cakes and beflowered fruit stands seemed a trifle out of place in the great open space under the lint-room of the gin, that had been canvased in for the occasion, they excited as much admiration in their semi-demolished condition as in their pristine glory. But 'Mely Jane's wedding feast was furnished more substantially, and if the delicate frost-work of the city cake found itself in too close proximity to the roast pig of Pete's providing, or a pile of hot sweet potatoes aspired to overtop the nougat pyramid, or the colored wax candles were stuck in flat white squashes for candle-sticks, who cared? 'Mely Jane

had a real "quality" wedding, and everybody was happy except, perhaps, "Brer Ben."

"Brer Ben" had soured on the world, so to speak, since becoming "Pa'son Ben." He considered a cheerful countenance or a hearty laugh as temptations of the Evil One, and religiously refrained from indulging in either. Nothing could have induced him to lend his countenance to the sons and daughters of Belial that gathered in the dance-house every Saturday night, and made night hideous with the fiddle and the bones and patting. The outward and visible signs of Brer Ben's sanctity were many and irrefragable, but there were those malignant enough to hint that it was just as well to count your chickens after he had been seen in the neighborhood of your coop, or to lock your sweet potatoes against him.

Brer Ben was promptly on hand to join 'Mely Jane and Pete in the bonds of holy wedlock. He regarded the long table, tottering, if not groaning, under its weight of wedding cheer, with furtive approval. The long table was a narrow plank affair on untrustworthy legs, which were nothing more than pointed pickets driven hard down into the beaten soil under the gin shed. Pete had labored industriously over it all that morning. The bolt of new white muslin that answered the purpose of table damask hid all deficiencies, but did not prevent a certain undulatory movement in the surface which made Pete quake anxiously at every addition to its contents, as he expressed a devout hope to his best man that "all the vittles would be et up befo' de table colopse."

'Mely Jane's own appearance extracted an audible

groan of disapprobation from Brer Ben's deep chest. She furnished him a text as she stood before him in an attitude copied closely from the one Miss Amelia had posed in so recently, challenging the admiration of the "quality." If 'Mely Jane failed of impressing her public, it was not for lack of conscientious study on her part. The effect was slightly marred by Pete himself. 'Mely Jane was of that rich off-color known as "griff," while Pete rivaled the ebony writing-desk in the library at the big house for color and polish. 'Mely Jane towered above her groom with a giraffe-like extension above the shoulders. Pete, in the long black swallow-tail presented by his w'ite folks for the occasion, cowered under her protecting wing, as it were ; but it was a very gorgeous wing on that occasion, and as Pete lifted his eyes reverentially to the wreath of poppies and cornflowers that supplied the place of 'Mely Jane's familiar bandanna handkerchief, his soul swelled within him, and it was without a single mental reservation that he swore valorously among other things to "protect" his towering bride.

But so much of this world's pomp and vanity was not to be overlooked by Brer Ben. What more fitting illustration of the devil's power as a tempter was he ever likely to find than was furnished by 'Mely Jane in her "changeable" green and gold silk, or in the crowning frivolity of those poppies and cornflowers? Brer Ben summoned the candidates for matrimony to take their places before him in his best "meetin'-house" voice. It was sonorous and imposing. 'Mely Jane briskly took the lead, with Pete fol-

lowing meekly in her wake. (They have observed the same order ever since.) Brer Ben's address, delivered prior to the joining of hands, was a happy medium between a funeral sermon and a judge's charge to the jury in a criminal case.

"Sistern and breddern, we is meet togedder to jine dis man and dis woman in de bonds of holy widlock. Leas'ways I is meet to jine 'm' en you is meet prin-supply, I tek it, outer a hankerin' arter de flesh pots uv Egyp. De flesh pots uv Egyp is ve'y good in der way. I ain' got nothin' to say ag'in 'm 'ceptin' this, de Bible say man shall not live by bread alone. Some folk thinks dat means you's 'bleege to hev turkey en' crenberries ev'y day, but I don' fin' no support for no sech preposition uv carnalniss widin de leds uv de good book. What I does fin' der, sistern and bred-dern" (here Brer Ben's eyes traveled slowly from the hem of 'Mely Jane's changeable silk to the biggest red poppy in her bridal wreath), "is dis, 'Vanity of vanity, all is vanity, sayith de preacher.' Now, sistern and breddern, I is de preacher on dis festif 'casion, en w'en I sees a pusson wid a charge to keep" (eying 'Mely Jane severely), "a prancin' 'round wid her head high up in de a'r, fur all de worl' lak a unbroke colt in a pea fiel', I sez vanity. An' w'en I sees a pusson wid a immortal soul t' save en fit it fur de skeeye, a cavortin' roun' in de gyarments uv sin en selfishness, I sez vanity! An' w'en I sees de necklisses en' de braselits" (here 'Mely Jane clutched convulsively at her lava bracelet), "which is but de soundin' cimblins en tinklin' brass uv dis worl', adornin' uv de pusson of a young woman, I sez vanity twicet over. Sistern

en breddern, de Bible sez it is better to be in de house of mo'nin den in de house uv rejoicin'. We is all meet here t' rej'ice over 'Mely Jane Benson's takin' Pete—Pete—whar yo' udder name, nigger?" (severely). "Ransom," escaped timidly from Pete's tremulous lips, to be repeated sonorously by Brer Ben as he resumed: "Ransom, Pete Ransom, t' be her lawful en wedded husbin'. I purnounce you man en wife—s'loot yo' bride."

Brer Ben's harangue came to an untimely end. Aunt Winny, mistress of the feast, had whispered to him that "the chicken soup was gittin' col'er den a iern wedge." Brer Ben liked chicken soup, and he did not like iron wedges as an article of diet. He had sown enough good seed by the wayside to keep 'Mely Jane from going to perdition, unless she had positively made up her mind that that was the destination she preferred. He could have said a great deal more, but advice is as good cold as hot, and chicken soup is not. Brer Ben's homily was the only first hand thing 'Mely Jane ever had bestowed on her. Her preference is still for second hand things. She waived the ceremony of being saluted by her husband, not being able on the spur of the moment to recall any "quality" precedent for an osculatory finale to the marriage ceremony. Brer Ben turned with alacrity to the flesh pots of Egypt, and, his example proving infectious, Pete had the satisfaction he craved of seeing all the "vittles et up, befo' de table colopse."

The new barn floor resounded to the sound of shuffling feet and rattling bones that night far past the wee hours, though Brer Ben did not countenance

that part of the universal levity. It was a gala night at the quarters, and the memory of it lived long after 'Mely Jane's changeable green-and-gold silk was "wore to a frazzle," and her bridal wreath of poppies and cornflowers had perished as the grass of the field perisheth.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CHARLEY KNIGHT'S STRATEGY.

MARINERS know of certain small pests called "barnacles" that have a number of long curled things (in the absence of accurate information as to whether they should be called feet or proboscides, "things" is considered safest), which they fasten upon and about the wooden hulls of vessels, incrusting them to an incredible extent, until there is nothing for it but to lay by and make war to the knife upon the small but insidious foe. It is said the danger from these pests is greatest in sluggish waters.

Perhaps the time has not yet come for a true estimate to be placed upon the nature of that species of barnacle known as the carpet-bagger, nor upon the peril from them that the Ship of State ran in the early days of reconstruction. When she was tossing and plowing her war-path through stormy and troubled seas, the miserable parasites could gain no hold upon her stanch hull; but when she finally lay becalmed in the still waters of a hard-won haven of peace, they fastened upon her eagerly, greedily and harmfully.

That this species of barnacle properly belonged to the ephemera, is best proven by the frequency with

which one already hears the question asked, "What was a carpet-bagger?" Webster, in his supplement (the word finds no place among time-tested definitions), gives; "Carpet-bagger: "A term of contempt applied to a Northern settler in the southern part of the United States, after the close of the civil war, seeking only private gain or political advancement," which is comprehensive if not accurate, but casts the odium of indiscriminating contempt upon the people who applied the term to all Northern settlers; for the men who settled South for other objects than "private gain or political advancement" must have gone there in a purely benevolent missionary spirit, and deserved better treatment, even at the hands of sore-hearted rebels quivering under recent defeat.

To drop metaphor, which is in itself fraught with serious peril, only those who have had direct personal experience of that vicious outcome of the civil war, the carpet-bagger, can properly gauge the baleful influence he exercised upon the solemn task of reconstructing the Union. Every town sufficiently large or prosperous to excite cupidity had its one or more specimens of the genus, who, settling among a people lying panting and exhausted from a fierce struggle that left them well-nigh destitute of every thing that makes life worth living, proceeded to put on the thumbscrews and virtually fulminated the new ethical code, the greatest good to the smallest number. Impotent to get rid of them, their victims showered inadequate contempt upon them, which was received with stolid outward equanimity, so long as it affected neither their private gain nor their political advance-



ment disastrously, but, rankling inwardly, was doubtless the primal cause of many an act of disorder and violence, which has been harshly attributed to the unexorcised spirit of rebellion.

Before the men of Slaterville had had time fairly to shake the dust of the battle-field from their worn-out shoes, or substitute civilians' clothes for their shabby gray uniforms, they were made aware of a presence in their midst that boded no good to them. A new lawyers' firm was established in town, and on its smart new shingle were two names that nobody had ever heard before. Men smiled grimly at the idea of new lawyers coming to Slaterville, where the old ones had found it hard enough to "grabble" a living before the war, and, of course, it would be ten times as bad now that there was not only nothing left to fight over, but no money to pay the lawyers for the fighting. Plainly those two young men had made a big mistake, and the Slaterville people took a malicious pleasure in leaving them to find it out for themselves. As for them and their households, there was work a-plenty on hand for them, rebuilding and restocking their stores; learning how to deal in new fashion with the freedmen (an unfamiliarized element of the new order, which they handled awkwardly enough at first, dreading always to err on the side of concession); communicating with the commission merchants, upon whom they must depend for help before they could turn a wheel; and, most onerous, most strange of all, learning how to put their own shoulders to the wheel.

The conspicuous presence of the new lawyers in the little town was a perpetual provocation to recall the

ante-bellum bar of Slaterville. "Ah, there had been men of big brains handling big interests, in those days, and the Court House at Slaterville had echoed to many a burst of eloquence that might have fallen from the lips of a Webster or a Prentiss and done them no discredit." Slaterville had been very proud of its bar. There had been Peter Anderson, poor fellow! A brighter brain and a bigger heart were never united in one personality. He hadn't lived long after putting on the gray; shot through that big heart of his at Shiloh. And there were the Poindexter brothers; they made one think of Richard and Saladin contending with ponderous battle ax and polished scimitar when they were pitted against each other in a case; and then almost in each other's arms as soon as it was decided. And Drake and Gibson—"They were lightning." There wasn't one of them that couldn't crush these new fellows in an argument; but they were all scattered. The Poindexter boys had gone to Nicaragua, and Drake and Gibson had declined coming back to starve; they had concluded to try their luck in St. Louis. What these new men could expect to make out of the law *there* was more than Slaterville could divine. But the new men did not seem at all perturbed at the prospect. In fact, they looked as if they could well afford to wait for a practice to grow. They were not unwilling to be friendly and sociable, and at first showed a decided disposition to join the groups of returned soldiers, whose wounded spirits derived a certain amount of balm from telling over the stories of their fights and their escapes and their strategic moves perhaps a trifle vaingloriously, perhaps with

the modesty of true courage, to the interested listeners who had only sniffed the battle from afar. But they were not made welcome by soldier or citizen, and soon accepted the unspoken fiat of social ostracism, which was an error on the part of the Slaterville people.

"It would be different, you see," said Charley Knight, turning his flashing eye (the only one he had brought back with him), on the group which had been silently observing one of the new men as he left them and walked rapidly toward the little cottage, which was lodging-house and law-office in one for him and his partner, "if those fellows had ever been soldiers and had stood their chances of hit or miss with the rest of the blue coats, but " (polite literature demands a hiatus) "they've never so much as smelled gunpowder, and have come down here in the wake of the army like a flock of buzzards to pick our bones after the flesh's all gone." Which was so true in every essential particular that no one dissented from Charley Knight's rather hyperbolical way of putting the case.

The attitude of the white men of the South toward the freedman was at first one of confused uncertainty, somewhat as if a needy artisan were given a tool the nature of which and the manner of using which were totally unfamiliar to him, and were told to make his livelihood by it. A livelihood must be extracted out of the land by the use of these new tools, but they were edged tools and must be handled with discretion. It is easy enough *now* to smile at the absurdities of *then*, but it was a "ticklish experiment," and men resumed their industrial occupations in rather a haphazard fashion. They could not command these new

made citizens, and they could not treat with them as man to man. Another error on the part of the Slaterville people. Things were all out of kelter. Unsatisfactory as laborers, they could not accept these freed slaves at all as citizens and voters. That was simply a huge joke. Even after, through their own ineligibility to office by reason of obstinacy in the matter of taking the oath, all the local offices had been impartially distributed between their former teamsters and gardeners and hostlers, they could see only the funny side of this sudden enfranchisement of the darkey. There was no special apprehension concerning it. The new officials comported themselves with an absurd mixture of deference and crude dignity, and Charley Knight was the first man to address his own emancipated stock-minder as Justice, with a rollicking laugh which made the new Justice of the Peace show his superb white teeth in an animated responsive grin. It was only when it became apparent that the new county officials were nothing more than so many supple-jacks, manipulated by the new lawyers, that the people of Slaterville began to awaken to a sense of their own mistaken policy. What other outcome was possible? Ignorant, unlettered, timid, affrighted at the responsibility thrust upon their feeble hands, they must be advised, tutored, led; and a white man must tutor them. The new lawyers did what the old masters would better have done. The tutelage was adverse to the true interests of the country. They awoke with a start when it was too late. Things assumed a serious aspect at the time Justice Sam, as Charley Knight and the rest of them called him, Mr. Baker, as the new men

addressed him, had to sit upon his first case, in which the conflicting interests of the white man *versus* the black came up for consideration. Before that case came up Justice Sam's administrative ability had been exercised exclusively upon insignificant squabbles among his own people, but when it was understood that Major Jim Blake had been summoned to appear before Sam to answer to the charge of having "willfully and with malice aforethought shot at and killed a sow belonging to one Benjamin Davis, lessee on said Blake's plantation," public indignation was aflame.

It was toward dusk of a chill November day that Major Blake rode into Slaterville, sitting sternly erect on his old war horse, whose visible anatomy had gained him the title of Praise-God-Bare-Bones (the giver of the name presumably considering the possession of any horse in those days occasion for thanksgiving). He was in the custody of his own ex-dining-room boy and his neighbor Rawlings's ox-driver, respectively the sheriff of the county and his deputy. He had come to stand his trial for sow slaughter, and was conveyed directly to the cottage of the new lawyers, where Sam's court of justice was always held. The men of Slaterville ground their teeth in impotent rage as the majestic old soldier, the battle-scarred hero of a dozen engagements rode by their doors between his saffron-hued custodians. As for the major himself, it was only by the rigid setting of his square under jaw, and a certain pallor about his high cheek bones, that he betrayed any sense of the indignity of it all.

The decision of the court that Major Blake be com-

pelled to pay costs and twelve dollars to plaintiff, despite the proven fact of frequent warnings, did not pour oil upon the troubled waters of public sentiment. Thereafter the white men of the county rashly concluded that their interests as a community were to be arrayed against the interests of their old slaves, with whom the "shysters" who manipulated them were identified. On the other hand, the new men, accepting scorn and obloquy as their inevitable portion; grew more and more bold in reaching out for that political preferment which was the true motive of their temporary acceptance of the taboo laid upon them socially. The whirligig of time would bring in their revenge. The petty local offices, with their lean pickings, the Nation's wards were welcome to, but the larger, fatter, and more dignified positions, that gave control of county affairs, they aspired to themselves. The price Sam Baker and his confrères were expected to pay for their own sudden elevation to the dizzy heights of political power and comparative opulence was the free-will offering of their newly acquired votes. Not that it seemed much of an offering to Sam, that mysterious little ballot whose chief excellence consisted in making him feel more like "w'ite folks," but the new bosses knew, and he was bound by every obligation of gratitude, to cleave unto the men that had made him a "jestus" of the peace and called him Mr. Baker, and actually invited him to sit down in their presence. True, when he accepted this invitation, Sam simply appropriated the minimum of the chair seat, and felt about as uncomfortable as he looked, but that did not lessen the honor. Ah, yes,

those were dark days—ininitely darker than when, amid the smoke of battle, and the shrieking of shell, and the whistling of bullets, the men of Slaterville had stood face to face with the foes who had come out, as they had, to do battle for what they conceived to be right, and dared to die for the maintenance of a principle. There was a grandeur in that that made it easy for them to accord the meed of praise, and perhaps, some of these days, it would be possible for them to love *such* enemies. But this was different. Here they must consent to match craft with craft, meet guile with guile, or submit to being politically effaced in their own country. It looked darker than ever when the nominations for tax-receiver and district-attorney were announced. The two new men were the candidates. "It would be a walk-over," the men of Slaterville said gloomily, for there wasn't a corporal's guard among them who had taken the iron-clad oath that would give them equal political rights with Sam Baker and the rest of them. A deadly supineness came upon them. Things were in too much of a snarl for them to grapple with, all exhausted and dispirited as they were. The struggle for daily bread was so stern and real that, closely as that matter of tax-receiver and district-attorney touched them, it was with a dull pain they accepted the nominations, and prophesied dreary things yet to befall, rather than with that sharp, keen resentment that leads to redress.

It was Charlie Knight who was led to do a thing that in his own chafed soul he called a beastly thing to do. "Boys," he said, facing abruptly around on a group of sober-faced men who had been discussing the

political muddle with bitter words and angry gestures, "I'm going to that mass meeting to-night. It's a beastly thing to do, but I begin to suspect we've been more nice than wise all along. We've let the shysters have it all their own way."

"How are you going to prevent it?" a mocking voice asked.

"I don't know," said Charlie. His one eye looked perplexedly down on the men who were whittling mercilessly on the store gallery benches. "That's what I want to find out ; but we've been foot balls for these fellows long enough."

Three or four voices were raised in protest : "You'll be insulted if you go to Barnes's gin to-night. Better stay away, Charlie. It's a mass meeting of darkies. It's in 'em to do worse than insult you." But it was no mere impulse that had stirred Charlie to this sudden resolve. The men of Slaterville all knew that, once his mind made up, there was no power on earth could make him swerve from the line of conduct he had adopted. His inaction, like that of nearly all the men about him, had been more pre-occupation than any thing else. No one volunteered to go with him. He was glad of it. He was sure of himself, but he could not say as much for any of the rest of the fellows. He didn't want any tinder-boxes along. His own going was the result of serious reflection.

Barnes's gin was a huge shingle-roofed affair, with an immense earth-floored space beneath it into which the cotton bales were ejected from the press above, and where they accumulated to be marked before



shipment. There were no cotton bales there then, nor had there been for several years now. There were little locks of the lint, cobwebbed and dirty, still clinging to the rough-hewn joists and rafters, and a rude litter of iron ties and cotton-weighers, and discarded picking baskets filled what space was left by the crowd of dark faces that were massed under its roof. They made a weird picture to Charlie Knight as he quietly joined himself to the crowd unnoticed. The illumination was poor. At the remote end of the space, mounted on the tongue of an old ox-cart, stood the orator of the occasion. Charlie could see by the dim light of the carriage lantern swung over his head that it was Uncle Isham, his own gardener. "One of the few," he said to himself bitterly, "that he had thought true to the backbone." There was no other light under the gin-shed and there were no seats. They were all standing, stolidly listening, neither approving nor dissenting. There was a strong infusion of tobacco smoke in the atmosphere, and the red glow from a score of short, black pipes punctuated the gloom. Uncle Isham was in full tilt when Charlie, stopping quietly on the outskirts of the dark mass, drew his hat well down over his face and listened.

"Boys, lis'n t' me. I is ben young en now I is ol' ; thar's no use uv denyin' hard fac's. I is ol', en gettin' older, en mo' no 'count ev'y day I lives ; but, boys, de Bible says, lis'n to de words of destruction on 'spise 'em not. You-alls ack lak you was plum crazy, boys, you cert'n'y does. I is ben sittin' over thar on a bunch uv cotton ties, jes a listenin' to you-alls en a tryin' t' fin' out wa't you is drivin' et enny

which-a-way. Does you all know yoseff? W'at de w'ite folks ever done t' you-all ennyhow? Ain' dey done feed you, en clothe you, en look arter you w'en you sick, en help you ev'ry time you want help? Tell me dat. En ain't you free now? Tell me dat. Kyarn you pick up en lef one plantashun en go to anudder, ef one plantashun don' suit you en t'udder one does? Tell me dat. En kyarn you go to meetin' ev'ry Sunday en to pra'r meetin' ev'ry Saturday night ef you feels like it en nobody t' hinder you? Tell me dat. W'at mo' you-all want ennyhow? Tell me dat. Boys, I is broke in a heap er colts in my life, powerful skittish ones at dat, but I 'clar' fo' goodness I never see a unbroke colt go on no wuss den some uv you young fellers since you got de bit between yo' teef. I didn' get up yhere to do no great 'mount uv speechifyin'. 'Tain in my line. I jes' got up yhere t' say a word or two to yer fer yer own good, boys. If you yhere me, I'd rather enny day see Mars Charlie Knight, my ol' Miss's boy, w'at I ben knowin' ever since he was bawn en ain' never kotch in a lie yit, runnin' for office yhere 'mongst his own folks, den er stranger w'at we got t' tek on his own say so; en, boys—one mo' word, en de ol' man's done. He gwine wash he's han's uv you arter to-night. Ontel I gets rich 'nough to buy a whole bar'l of po'k en a bar'l of co'n-meal all at oncet, I'se gwine to stick t' de man dat carries de smoke-house keys. Now I'se done. Dat's my las' word."

A hat went up on the outskirts of the dense crowd, a clear young voice called for three cheers for Uncle Isham, and then Charlie Knight, broad shouldered

and muscular, elbowed his way to the front, and springing lightly to the tongue from which Uncle Isham had just laboriously descended, asked cheerily: "Boys, may I say a few words to you now?" They were mute from surprise, but as there were no dissentient voices he plunged into what it had occurred to him it would be good for them to hear.

"Uncle Isham has been giving you some very good advice, boys. I am interested in knowing how many of you will follow it. He gave me some too. He didn't know I was standing there in the dark, listening to him. I'm going to follow it. I'm going to run for tax-receiver myself. It never occurred to me until Uncle Isham suggested it. I'm much obliged to him for doing it. And you know, boys, you can vote for me or you can vote for the other fellow, just as you choose, but I think if I was you I'd follow Uncle Isham's advice and stick to the man who carries the smoke-house keys yet awhile. Later on, perhaps, you will be all carrying smoke-house keys, but not if you spend your time loafing around white men who do their best to make you hate your old friends. You are free now, boys, as free as I am. Whether we ever had any right to own you or not it is too late to talk about, but there's no good reason why we shouldn't all pull together since we're in the same boat, and there's no other boat for any of us to get in, and I think Uncle Isham would make a tip-top stroke oar for us. I've got just this one more word to say, boys. You're better off than I am in one respect; you've got a vote and I haven't, but I intend to get even with you on that score. I'll take the oath to-morrow, and I'll

come out as an independent-candidate. Perhaps your bosses haven't taught you what that is yet. However, I didn't come here canvassing, for I didn't know I was going to nominate myself, but I'd like to shake hands with every man here who believes that I am as much his friend now as I ever was, and that if—mind you, boys, I only say if—any of you should vote for me for tax-receiver, it would be because you think I'd make an honest one."

It was an inspiration !

"Hurray fur Marse Charlie Knight," Uncle Isham shouted in a cracked voice, flourishing his old straw hat wildly over his gray wool before flinging it entirely away in his frenzied eagerness to be the first man to shake hands with his candidate. They crowded about him laughing, jostling, cheering in childlike, mercurial relief at this sudden change from the oppressive solemnity of Uncle Isham's address, that had almost sounded like a prophecy of woe to come, to the chatty pleasantry of the young soldier. They had been trying to think, and the effort tired them. They were not used to thinking for themselves. They were used to being bidden and to obeying the direction of superior wills. This was the first time one of their own "w'ite folks" had condescended to meet them in argument. Charlie did not overestimate the force of this outburst. He had found them in a subdued frame of mind, standing in a darkness not all physical, bewildered, and groping along an untried path. He had afforded them relief from a present perplexity. That was all. To-morrow the shysters would have their ears again, and, no doubt, would make them thoroughly

ashamed of this sudden spurt of loyalty to an old slave owner. He could only be sure of one thing, and that was that he and the other fellows in Slaterville had been pursuing a suicidal policy all along, and the quicker they changed it the better.

All the Slaterville men crowded around him the next morning to hear his experience of the night before. He gave it half-laughingly, enumerating exaggeratedly the number of unwashed hands that had clasped his in enthusiastic indorsement of all he had said, then, in more serious vein : " And, boys, I've resolved to fight the devil with fire. I'm going to take the oath and get back my vote. It's a piece of furniture I can't afford to dispense with. That done, I'm not going to run myself, for those scamps over yonder would be too strong for me. I'm going to run Sandy for tax-receiver. I've changed my mind on that point."

" Sandy ! Why, he's a blockhead ! "

" Yes," Charley assented cheerfully.

" And he don't know B from a bull's foot."

" Of course not."

" How would he get along then ? "

" He'd have to hire a clerk, and I'm going to apply for the situation."

This was too much for their gravity. The men of Slaterville laughed more loudly and more unanimously than they had laughed since the war. It was so simply ridiculous, you know. Charlie Knight, one of the most fastidious fellows in the county (a handsome one he had been, too, before that bayonet thrust had deprived him of an eye), applying for a position as clerk

to the negro boy who had brushed his clothes and blackened his boots every day of his life until he had gone into the army. That would be putting the bottom rail on top with a vengeance. But it turned out to be another one of Charley's inspirations.

He declined the nomination formally tendered him by a small committee headed by Uncle Isham, telling them that on second thoughts he felt quite sure that he could not carry the election, and therefore proposed they should elect one of their own color, who, he was "sure, would administer the duties of his office faithfully and honestly." It was a stroke of genius, and one that filled the discomfited carpet-baggers with envious admiration of his diplomatic powers. Sandy carried the election by a tremendous majority. What if he could neither read the oath of office nor sign his own name to a receipt for taxes? All the more imperative necessity for his having a clerk, and there was an efficient and accommodating one ready to his hand in his own "Marse Charlie." Some of the taxpayers who were brought into personal contact with the new receiver reported that it was "as good as the circus to see Charlie Knight performing his duties as clerk in the tax-office, with Sandy staring at him like a dead and stuffed monkey." But the business was conducted to every body's satisfaction, and Sandy was happy and Charley was triumphant; so where's the odds?

But all that happened ever and ever so long ago. Slaterville is one of the most flourishing towns in the new South now, and Charlie Knight is no longer Sandy's clerk. He is Congressman for his district. He says he never had any political aspirations before he

delivered his maiden speech from the tongue of an ox-cart in Barnes's gin-shed, but that having tasted blood he craved more. He is a sort of idol with his Slaterville constituents, who declare that it was Charlie Knight who broke the backbone of carpet-bag rule in the county, and if it had not been for his activity in electing Sandy to be tax-receiver it would have taken them all longer than it did to get out of the Slough of Despond.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### COLONEL SUTTON'S GOVERNESS.

WHEN one of Colonel Rafe Sutton's girls fell from the ladder that had been planted against the side of the house, by the whitewasher, and broke an arm, and the same week one of his boys was fished out of the bayou half drowned, in consequence of trying to cross it in an old dugout that had been stranded ever since the last high water, the people of Black's Bayou said "it was high-time Colonel Sutton was getting a governess to look after his children." In local estimation those Sutton children were "just torn down," and cautious mothers congratulated themselves on the six miles of rough road that intervened between their own superior offspring and such hopeless young ne'er-do-wells.

Colonel Rafe (there were so many Suttons in the county that they were most readily distinguished by their Christian names) seemed to come to the same conclusion about the same time. He and Mrs. Rafe discussed the matter with true conjugal prolixity, and deciding, perhaps, that one governess would be more inexpensive than several possible funerals, proceeded forthwith to procure and install one.

Of course, he had always looked forward definitely



to the time when a strange young woman must be received into his house as one of the family, but for certain reasons of his own Colonel Rafe had not been inclined to precipitate her advent. He had always intended giving his children a better chance for schooling than had fallen to his own lot. He hadn't had much of a show in his young days. He had only been waiting for Tillie and little Rafe, the two youngest, to come of an age when they too could be "put at their books," for as the governess would be on a fixed, and a big, salary, he was economically minded to give her as many pupils as possible. But while he waited for Tillie and little Rafe, Nannie, the oldest girl, had been efflorescing into a first-class tomboy, and Dave, his oldest, son had been recklessly sowing the wind that promised a future whirlwind of trouble for every body.

Colonel Rafe was conscious of certain deficiencies in himself, and in Mrs. Rafe too, that told against them when circumstances threw them into contact with what he was pleased to call the "old-timers." He was himself, comparatively speaking, a new-timer, having been a planter in his own name only for fifteen years. He intended his young ones to enter into enjoyment of the money he was piling up for them less heavily handicapped than he had been. There "shouldn't none of his boys ever oversee for any man living." He meant Dave should "law it" for a living, and little Rafe should be a parson or a doctor, whichever one he "took to readiest" after getting through with his books. As for the girls—ah! well, he'd see to it that they should have money enough to

make every body forget that their father had got his start in life as an overseer, whose unpaid salary had been canceled by his employer's turning over to him the small hill place back of Black's Bayou known as the Hardtimes place.

The Sutton escutcheon did not shine with effulgent radiance in the county where they rallied in such force on election day. Of course they were received in public (that is, the men were) on a footing of outward equality, but, nevertheless, there was a line of demarkation sharply drawn between the studied politeness extended to them on all occasions and the jovial freedom with which the old-timers and the descendants of the old-timers treated each other. No one ever joked with a Sutton. Couldn't, you know ; there were too many unsubstantiated, or, rather, undenied whispers afloat concerning them. Rafe Sutton "worked his hands on Sunday, whenever he got in the grass." Dick Sutton "had been caught cheating at poker the last time the fellows let him into a game in Davenport's back room." Another one of them had made a dishonest horse-trade, and still another, it was darkly hinted, received toll for grinding his nearest neighbor's corn in his grist-mill. They were not Sabbatarians nor strict constructionists of any sort, those old-timers, but a meanness of any description was an unpardonable sin, and if not punishable by the written laws of the State, might and must be reached through the unwritten law of local censure. Picayunishness was the indictment brought against the Suttons ; ostracism their sentence. None of the name smarted under this existing state of affairs more sorely than Colonel Rafe,

and that was the reason why he was so savagely resolved that Nannie, and Dave, and Tillie, and little Rafe should be equipped to hold their own proudly in the days that were to come.

Colonel Rafe never did things by halves. Now that the time had come when the presence of a governess was inevitable he was resolved to import the very best that money could procure. He advertised in the New York and Boston papers, and soon found himself involved in a correspondence that taxed his epistolary capacity to its utmost, and resulted in an engagement for a year with an unknown young woman of Boston, who expressed herself very choicely and very fluently, and signed her name with a flourish that made Colonel Rafe blush with confusion over the sharp contrast his own clumsy signature presented to it. "I guess she'll set us down for Yahoos, ma," he said, sighing resignedly, as he restored to its envelope the governess's final missive (in which she told him just when he might expect her), "but if she does the right thing by the chicks, we won't mind that;" and Mrs. Rafe agreed that they wouldn't in the least mind that. Both of them, in fact, were quite ready to efface themselves utterly for the benefit of their offspring, but neither was willing to put into words the various disturbing reflections connected with the coming of this stranger. Mrs. Rafe loved her ease—she was portly and she was not symmetrical—she groaned inwardly at the reflection that after the arrival of this Boston importation she should have to endure the martyrdom of corsets and linen collars at every meal. She hoped this young woman could eat like other people. She had a vague

idea, couldn't have told you for the world how she got it, that Boston intellectuality was exclusively the outcome of Boston baked beans and Boston brown bread. She consulted every cookery-book she could buy or borrow, with a view to preparing those delicacies in home-like style for the young exile, and the quantity of cow-peas and sugar-house molasses she consumed in her abortive attempts was beyond computation.

Colonel Rafe suffered under the apprehension that it would no longer be optional whether he wore his jeans coat to the dinner table or left it hanging on the hat-rack in the hall. It was almost a foregone conclusion that he would never dare to smoke his pipe again any nearer than the corn-crib or the cotton-gin. "Those Yankee women had very strict notions, especially about the management of the male sex." But it would be all right so the young ones got the benefit of her rigidity. The young ones looked forward uneasily to the beginning of a general reign of terror, notwithstanding which there was no stint of anxiety to make the bedroom upstairs that was to be hers look as cheerful and homelike as possible. On the mantel-piece, at both ends of it, were big blue jars stuck full of red berries and mistletoe. It was not Christmas time, but the mistletoe was thick on the oaks in the big front yard, and its waxen white berries contrasted prettily with the stiff branches of wild privet that Dave himself went for to the woods. A flat glass dish—Mrs. Rafe's best preserve dish indeed—full of zinnias and yellow chrysanthemums, occupied the center of the table that stood between the two

windows of the room. The Colonel and Mrs. Rafe consulted together over the books that should flank the preserve-dish ; as she was from Boston of course she was very profound. Personally they had very little preference in the matter of selection. There were quite a lot of books in the glass book-case in the dining-room. The former owner, Colonel Rafe's employer, had brought them there from time to time when sojourning at Hardtimes. Burton's "Anatomy" and "Butler's Analogy" had a certain alliterative sonorous sound about them that secured their selection as *pièces de resistance*. A classical dictionary, a book of familiar poetical quotations, with Ouida and Rhoda Broughton thrown in for *lagniappe*, satisfied them on the score of mental refreshment for the stranger. All that was done on the day before she was expected to arrive. Colonel Rafe was to go into town for her to-morrow in the buggy. In the meantime there seemed to be a tacit understanding that this last day of domestic privacy should be enjoyed without restriction. The pains and penalties of unyielding corsets and rigid linen collars were things of to-morrow, which must take care of themselves without any assistance from Mrs. Rafe, who devoted the piece of the afternoon that was left, after giving a few supplementary touches to the stranger's room, to "sorting" her bewildering looking work-basket, big as a bushel measure, toppling high with the accumulation of weeks. Colonel Rafe, guiltless of cravat or coat, was engaged in his favorite indoor occupation—rubbing up his Winchester rifle and shot-gun, whose dismembered parts occupied the whole of one side of

Mrs. Rafe's bedroom (which was the family sitting-room. The children, mindful of their coming bondage, were holding a farewell banquet to freedom in another corner of the room; a long-handled corn-popper, whose contents had contributed materially to the feast which was spread on two chairs, reclined against one of the brass andirons that supported the blazing logs of wood.

Into this scene of unalloyed domestic felicity, without a moment's warning, the Boston governess was ushered by Uncle Ottaway with a few explanatory remarks:

"Yhere's little miss, Mars Rafe. She took a up-country boat stidder de packet, an hit lan' her up to ol' Miss Murray's. She forwarded her in de buggy, en I foun' her at de fron' gate. I tol' her dere warn' no front do' bells nor sich like in dis part er de country, so es she jes' wouldn' walk in widout knockin', I 'lowed I hafter fotch her."

Self-possessed, with her keen vision taking in every phase of this novel home scene, the Boston girl made her position clearer still and was made awkwardly but kindly welcome by her employers. If she was a novelty to them—what were they to her?

That night (she was mercilessly methodical) she made her first entry in her new diary. She was resolved to note down the impressions made on her cultured mind by the every-day events of her new life. This was the entry (it serves to illustrate how general truths are propagated): "Southern people are queer, but kind-hearted. The men wear no cravats or coats, and make arsenals of their wives' bedrooms! The

women are indolent in the extreme, and totally regardless of those niceties of the toilet that indicate a refined nature. The children of both sexes satisfy the cravings of nature at the most inopportune times and places." (Had she not seen these things with her own eyes, and was she not warranted, therefore, in placing her impressions on record? Was not that the true way to enlighten the world concerning this peculiar people?) She was writing on the table where the offering of yellow chrysanthemums and brilliant zinnias made a bright spot of color in her new room. It was a large room. She had never slept in such a very big room all by herself, and just outside of it was a big hall, with all sorts of boxes and chests that burglars might secrete themselves behind. And these strange people never turned the keys in their front or back doors. Life could hardly be safe in such a disorganized, or rather unorganized, state of society. At least, she could turn the key in her own door if they did tell her down stairs not to lock it, because her fire would be made very early in the morning. She would go without a fire forever before she would risk her life so recklessly. The door that opened into the big hall opened just at this juncture, and a small figure stood irresolutely in the doorway for a second, looking at the governess with admiring awe. Then it came forward until it reached the hearth-rug, and stopped again to say timidly and deprecatingly :

"I'se 'Mandy. Miss says I'se gwine to be yo' nigger." Having thus defined her own social status, 'Mandy loosed her clutch on the corner of a dingy calico "comfort" she had dragged in by the ears, as

it were, and seemed to wait for some response from the stranger. But none came immediately.

The governess's heart at that moment was the seat of many commingled emotions. One of the prime reasons for her answering this far-away call to Black's Bayou was the golden opportunity it would afford for her to sow some good seed in the rocky soil of slave-owners' hearts, and to inform herself correctly as to the status of these down-trodden sisters and brothers about whom the whole country was then growing violently agitated. For the first time in her life she found herself alone in a room with one of these down-trodden sisters, and she was shocked at the character of her own emotions. Such a little harmless-looking sister as it was, too ! with small, bare, ashy-looking ankles coming out of a pair of immense red brogans, only to lose themselves again under the clumsy hem of a red and black plaid linsey skirt, with a thin little neck, tied about with a bright bandanna handkerchief, surmounted by a round good-natured face, in which two black bead-like eyes were stuck, like plums in a batter pudding. Such an innocent little face as 'Mandy's was ! She was accustomed not to be dealt with ceremoniously by "w'ite folks," so finding the young lady somewhat unresponsive, she proceeded to spread her comforter in form of a pallet on one side of the fireplace, and dropping upon it in a sitting posture, said affably :

"Miss Maggy says I'se to wait on you. I'se to be yo' nigger, en' nobody elstis."

"Who is Miss Maggy ?" the governess asked, laying down her pen and coming over to the hearth-rug,



where she stood looking down on 'Mandy, who was placidly loosening the stiff leathern strings to her new brogans, preparatory to releasing her feet from dur-  
ance vile.

"Miss Maggy 's Miss Suttin, Mars Rafe's wife, Mistess." 'Mandy gave this unpunctuated explanation with wonderful rapidity ; "she say I gwine to be yo' nigger now. I gwine to wait on you."

"But I don't need any waiting on ; I can wait on myself."

'Mandy looked up at her in dumb surprise. This was a contingency she was totally unprepared for. It involved perhaps a tremendous disappointment for her. The governess was a new species of white folks. "You gwine send me back to the quarters?" she asked, fastening her black beads of eyes on the governess's face. "I'd ruther stay here. I kin comb yo' hyar, ef you'll let me stay here." She sprang up with alacrity and placed a chair so immediately under the governess that sitting down in it was rendered somewhat compulsory. Then she dropped down on the comfort, and taking off the unyielding brogans, she stood them rigidly side by side against the chimney jamb, eying them with an expression of personal animosity, as she addressed them threateningly : "You des hol' on. I gwine to grease yo' t'morrer wid a piece er bac'n rine, I is."

Plainly 'Mandy regarded herself as mistress of the situation, for, once relieved of the torture of her leathery imprisonment, she sprang nimbly to her feet and inaugurated her willing service by turning down the bed-clothes, awkwardly and unsymmetrically, it is

true, for she had just that day been imported from the quarters for this special rôle. With a great slop and splash she poured the water in the foot-bath, then looked about zealously for some other service to render. She was in the habit of hearing w'ite folks tell black folks what to do, but this was the "cu'ousist w'ite folks ever she see." She came back to the fire-place again and dropped despairingly on the comfort. It never once occurred to her that she was the meager embodiment of an awe-inspiring idea in the governess's mind. She proceeded slowly and absently with her own preparations for retiring. Taking the bandanna from about her neck, she brought into view a barbaric display of glass beads of many sizes and every color. She glanced up to see if such a flash of splendor had not aroused that "cu'ous w'ite 'ooman" to some interest in her personality. Evidently it had not. She yawned cavernously and explained honestly :

"I'se sleepy, I is. Gr'mammy hed me up las' night skeerin' de pigs fum under de house mos' ali night."

"Where is your mother, Amanda?" the governess asked with irreproachable precision of diction.

"My mammy?" 'Mandy asked, with a puzzled upward glance.

"Yes."

"She's daid. My mammy's daid, she is; dey's gwine t' preach her fun'ul naix Sund'y. My mammy's been daid gwine on fo' years." 'Mandy imparted this bit of family history cheerfully, as she punched the glowing wood fire to see the sparks fly upward,

adding reflectively : "I wonder whar my mammy *now*." Plainly here was a benighted soul, and a golden opportunity ! It was worth coming so far outside the pale of civilization to procure such virgin soil for the sowing of her good seed. 'Mandy dropped the tongs with which she had been improvising pyrotechnics as a solemn question fell on her startled ears :

"Amanda, do you know who made you ?"

'Manda regarded reflectively the glowing logs before which she was sitting tailor-fashion for a long second before giving her final decision in a tone of absolute conviction : "Nobody didn't mek me, less'n 'twere Mammy, en she mus' 'a jes' started me, 'cause I war'n but jes' half made w'en she die. I'se twicet es big es I wuz w'en Mammy die."

The opportunity was not to be lost : "Did you never hear of God ? Of the God who made you and gave you all that you have ?"

"Yessum," she assented briskly, "en I'se heerd of de debbil too. I hear Unk Ishum tell Gr'mammy dat de debbil wuz in 'hill Sam's' fiddle, en he git inter de folks' heels eva Saterday night. Dat w'at I hyere Unk Ishum say to Gr'mammy."

'Mandy's benighted condition was beyond question. The marvel was that such profound spiritual ignorance could exist alongside of such happy indifference as to her soul's welfare. 'Mandy rose from the position of an humble and willing servitor that night, unconsciously, it is true, to that of an interesting subject for a great moral experiment. This young woman, whose own youth had been spent in such a rarified mental atmosphere, would find out for herself if 'Mandy was

possessed of the capacity to receive great moral and intellectual truths; she would read her accustomed portion of Scripture aloud, and she would select such portions as must probe the benighted soul in that small, dark body, if one really abode there.

As her gentle, cultivated voice rose on the quiet air of the room, 'Mandy clasped her hands reverently and bent her shining black eyes on the flames that were dancing far up the chimney. It always filled her with awe to hear white folks read "out loud." It didn't in the least matter what the words were, much less the sense of them. There was a certain rhythm in it that pleased 'Mandy's musical sensibilities. As the reading progressed her gaze became more intense. The light of a fixed purpose came into her shining eyes. Leaning forward, very softly, so as not to disturb the reader, she possessed herself of the shovel and softly raked a clean place among the glowing coals. Then diving suddenly under the comfort, she brought forth two long red sweet potatoes, which she laid noiselessly in the clean place and covered them quickly over with hot ashes, patting the mounds softly and compactly into the semblance of two miniature graves. Then she resumed an upright posture once more and gave her undivided attention to the reading.

"Amanda," said her new friend, closing the book at the end of the chapter, "did you hear what I read?"

"Yessum; kosc I hyur yo'," Mandy answered reproachfully.

"What did I read?"

Mandy inserted one ashy hand under her head-handkerchief to scratch her head reflectively: "You

say, fiff 'ronomy, sixteen verse—en de Lawd he driv Adam en Eve ouden de gyardin, he did, leastways Unk Ishum tol' de folks dat las' Sund'y." Then with sudden access of interest : " Missy, ef you gits hongry in de middle uv de night, you jes 'call 'Mandy, en she'll give you de hottes' sweet 'tater ever you git in your life." And 'Mandy patted the ashen graves in the fireplace affectionately with the back of the shovel. . . .

It seemed to the stranger the dead of night when, aroused by what she knew not, sitting bolt upright in the unfamiliar bed, she saw a grotesque sight and heard a plaintive sound. It was 'Mandy, sitting on the floor in front of the fire, whose logs, now reduced to "chunks," she had carefully placed close together and blown into a blaze with her own vigorous lungs. Her head-handkerchief had fallen off, revealing a sort of Medusa-like coiffure of innumerable snake-like plaits wrapped tightly about with twine. The ashen graves had given up their dead. One charred sweet potato lay upon the hearth, the other one was clasped in 'Mandy's left hand, while with the right she courageously attacked its hot cuticle. Rocking, biting, and bemoaning her own wickedness in alternate breaths, she cast quaint shadows on the ceiling of the room as she swayed her small body dolorously to and fro. Now she promised faithful amendment in all her wicked ways, even to the giving up of the cherished glass beads that begemmed her neck ; now she protested against the cu'ous wite 'ooman that had entered so promptly upon the work of proselyting ; now she took a comforting bite of hot sweet potato ; now she

called on the spirit of the mammy who had been "daid" nearly four years to bear witness to the genuineness of her conversion ; finally, openly and contritely relinquishing a preconceived plan to steal some of white folks' sugar for Gr'mammy the next day, she heaved one deep-drawn sigh from her unburdened conscience, and rolled suddenly over on the pallet, a peacefully snoring convert.

And the Boston girl composed herself among her pillows satisfied that she had found good soil in which to sow some of the seed she had imported with her.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### CAP SUTTON'S CHANCE.

THE exigencies of plantation life, where the slaves outnumbered the slave-holding population as enormously as it did in the "cotton-belt," necessitated the existence of a class of white men in the South before the war whose social position, being altogether anomalous, its responsibilities and duties were rarely ever assumed by men of other than a coarse moral and mental fiber.

Let him be possessed of all the granite virtues which, indeed, were essential to his success in his chosen sphere of usefulness, let him be never so honest, courageous, fair-minded, and humane, the overseer might never hope to mingle with the planters or their families on terms of social equality. He was a necessary and useful middle-man between the ease-loving planter and his slaves. His qualifications were purchasable, and his virtues had their stipulated price. That many an unrecorded heart-pang, many a stifled ambition, countless strangled desires, followed naturally in the wake of such a state of affairs, who can doubt?

Understanding the practical workings of the machine oftentimes better than the master himself, the overseer was placed at the head of affairs with an unreserved con-

fidence calculated to test the honesty of a bank president. Installed as the virtual master of many helpless creatures, and, for the time being autocratic in his control of their destinies, his position fostered a spirit of pride and tyranny wherever their germs naturally existed, and was such as to discourage those milder forms of administration which arise from a sense of accountability to a higher questioning authority. That higher questioning authority undoubtedly existed, and in a large majority of cases was exercised, but rarely with an openness that might weaken the authority of the middle-man. The planter who could afford his thousand or twelve-hundred-dollars-a-year overseer could afford to discharge from his own mind all those sordid details of plantation affairs that detracted so largely from its rural delights, and having domiciled his middle-man in a commodious house (architecturally an exact medium between the big house and the quarter cabins), located in as central a position as possible in the quarter lot, he had a right to look for a *quid pro quo* for his annual checks, in honesty, activity, and that sleepless vigilance which the exigencies of the case demanded.

It is easy to see why, things being thus, matrimony was hedged about with more than the usual obstacles which beset the unmoneyed wooer in every clime and every age. Few women courted the pains and penalties of such a position. The overseer himself might mingle with the planters on the store galleries, or at the wharf-boat, or wherever else a community of business interest might lead; might, indeed, if he were exceptionally presentable, be accorded the occasional



privilege of eating his Sunday's dinner at the big house, but while, individually, he might gain consideration on the score of being a social necessity, an overseer's wife had absolutely no *raison d'être*. She had better not exist at all.

Society in those conservative days viewed innovation with distrust. Any change presupposed a flaw in previous conditions. Such a supposition was rank heresy. Men might cease to oversee by dint of frugality and big salaries; might, indeed, turn themselves into planters by some such occult process as tadpoles mysteriously go through in order to become frogs; but the original tadpolish characteristics must always intrude themselves for observation, so that, socially speaking, the latter end of that man was scarcely better than the first. His children's children might hope to be recognized as *bona-fide* ladies and gentlemen, but not himself.

It was this existing state of affairs, wordlessly pressed in upon the inner consciousness of Colonel Rafe Sutton and his wife, that made them so bent upon giving their offspring a "number one chance." Colonel Rafe plumed himself upon having wooed and won his wife after he had moved out of the quarter lot and into his own house as actual possessor of Hardtimes, and he considered it lucky that old Dr. Robinson's Indiana cousin had come into the neighborhood on a visit just about that time. She was poor and had no prejudices, which latter qualification, always a good thing in woman, be she wife or maid, proved especially so in his case. Colonel Rafe often wished that "Cap," his oldest brother's son, might do

as well as he had done in the matrimonial line. But Cap was such a "queer fellow." Yes, every body in the neighborhood agreed in calling "Cap" Sutton a queer fellow. His queerness was emphasized variously: "A handsome fellow, but dumb as an oyster when the notion takes him." "As plucky as Julius Cæsar, but as stubborn as a mule." There was always a "but" where Cap Sutton was concerned. In his own morbid estimation the disjunctive conjunction had first come into play at his birth. He was born, but it would have been much better for him if he never had been. Family tradition informed him that his father had found a wife on board a trading boat that had lain tied to a stake in front of the Colonel's plantation for weeks, indeed, until its entire stock of "up-country" produce had found its way into the store-rooms of the various plantations around. The owner of the trading boat had a wife and a sister-in-law aboard. When he went away, he left the sister-in-law behind. Cap Sutton in later years was given to vain and idle speculations as to the possible influence upon his own destinies of that trading boat's never having tied up at the Colonel's landing, or of its owner never having had a sister-in-law. He had acquired a metaphysical turn by going to school with Al and Fred, the Colonel's sons, when they had the theological student there for a little while cramming them for college. It had been quite an accidental thing, his going to school with the boys at the big house. As a man he was given to wondering if it hadn't been one of his father's big mistakes letting him do it at all.

As he recalled things, he had been a more cheerful and happier boy before that mere sip at the Pierian spring. Then there had been no thought of degradation connected with the whitewashed frame house that stood in the center of the quarter lot, with its broad, open doorless hall cutting it in twain. There had been no suggestion of servitude in the ringing of the bell, as big as a church-bell, mounted on a stout post so close to the front gallery of his father's house that by reaching over he could seize the long rope tied to its clapper. It had been one of his childish joys to ring the big bell at twelve o'clock for the hands to "knock off" for their nooning, and again at one for them to go back to the fields. He had even enjoyed the excitement, in those plebeian days, of mounting the dusty slouching mules as they shuffled into the mule lot with their loosened plow gear jingling noisily about their heels, and riding them off to water. In that unambitious period of his existence he had held Falstaffian sway over a motley gathering of little darkies, whose departure from the period of their evolution from apes was but slightly marked in the matter of toilet. They were his to command in season and out of season, and, although conscious that loyalty was only to be secured by a liberal and continuous supply of hot biscuits surreptitiously secured, white taws, or china alleys, he enjoyed his brief authority without alloy and led his sable forces into deadly conflict with the Jamestown weeds or cockle-burrs that infested the quarter lot, with the proud consciousness that the boys at the big house, gazing enviously at him from the dormer window of

the up-stairs school-room, or through the garden palings, would gladly exchange their grand exclusiveness for his bare-footed and glorious liberty.

But all that had been before the Colonel, in a burst of indiscreet admiration for what he had been pleased to call "Cap's heroism," had insisted upon having him up to the big house to give him a chance. It was impossible ever to forget the day when he went to meet his chance. It all came back to him vividly whenever he fell into one of those somber-hued reveries that consumed so many precious moments of his young manhood. He remembered how vigorously his agitated mother had "scrubbed" (that was the only word that would befittingly describe those ablutions) his round freckled face, making sudden and fierce inroads into his ears and the corners of his blinking eyes, as if she would purge him from every defiling stain before sending him forth to be measured by the higher social standard of the big house. And how mercilessly she had tugged at the refractory masses of his brown hair that waved tightly up to its very roots. He could remember experiencing a species of shame for the waviness of his hair, as contrasted with the decorous smoothness of the other boys', and wondering if his obnoxious curls were a sort of mild form of "kink," caught by infection from his close proximity to the quarters. The imprisonment of his feet in the new shoes, for whose coming his advent in the school-room had been deferred several days, was not the least part of the torture of that first day at the big house. His shoes creaked, and the other boys' shoes didn't. It impressed him with a sense of general inferiority that

was as novel as it was uncomfortable. Up there, in the quarters, he had been an absolute autocrat in his way. In the school-room, with the Colonel's boys regarding him with that undisguised curiosity that the universal boy bestows unblinkingly upon the universal stranger, and with the Colonel's daughter, "little Miss Nellie" (whom he had heretofore looked at admiringly from a distance, as he might have looked at one of the fixed stars) regarding him shyly over the top of McGuffey's Second Reader, he felt inexpressibly far from home. He remembered, in these latter days, all the good advice and maternal admonition with which his mother had loaded him up that morning, as if he were a sort of big gun that might be expected to discharge itself effectively at the first pull on the lanyard. But he had no recollection of going off at all effectively on that occasion ; he had been too bitterly conscious of his starched collar and new shoes and the fresh pocket-handkerchief his mother had stuck, with such a fatal attempt at elegance, conspicuously in his jacket pocket. It had proven nothing but a snare for his further confusion, eluding his grasp whenever it was needed, and finally taking sanctuary immediately under Miss Nellie's chair. He would have died before attempting to recapture it from that sacred spot and yet had to undergo the fierce agony of having it returned to him by her own dainty hand.

There was no incident of that first day of schooling at the big house that was too trivial for memory to hold in a firm but painful grasp. But had it not been a mistake ; a mistake on the Colonel's part in offering him a chance and on his father's part in accepting it

for him? Before that there had been no basis for the sharp and cruel contrasts he had been drawing ever since with a growing sense of the injustice of certain lines of demarkation that were ineffaceable and inevitable—lines that, after his days of schooling, left him stranded midway between the things that were his by birthright and the things he had promptly learned how to value above that birthright. He remembered how, when the agony of his first bashfulness wore itself out, and the fascination of learning seized upon him violently, with what pride he had entered the lists against Al and Fred, all heavily handicapped as he was. They were generous-hearted boys, those rich sons of the rich Colonel, and the rivalry between them and the son of their father's overseer was of that generous sort that did good all around.

He remembered the glow of triumph that came into his mother's sallow cheeks, that Saturday morning when the Colonel stopped his horse by the cistern-shed that belonged to the overseer's house, to utter some words of commendation on his progress to her, as she stood there churning. They were very precious in her ears, coming, as they did, from the austere lips of the highest recognized authority within her ken. He had two unusually large pieces of black-berry pie that day for dessert, the second slice being an unsolicited tribute to his mental acquirements.

But the days had come when Al and Fred went off to college, and the theological student who had been the tutor at the big house for three years was succeeded by a musical young lady, who was fitted to carry the Colonel's daughter triumphantly through the

smaller and narrower gate to the temple of learning, better suited to her feminine capacity, and Cap had had his chance, and was prepared now (presumably) to cope with the world on that lower plane in which it had pleased God to place his father and his mother.

He no longer made daily pilgrimages to the up-stairs room at the big house, whose dormer windows looked out over the hills where the conical cedars grew in native liberality. He could see its white dotted muslin curtains fluttering in the breeze from the gallery of the overseer's house, that seemed small and mean and dirty now, since it had been put in such violent contrast with the oil-clothed halls and the matted floors of the master's house. They had not thrown him back on himself unprovided for in certain ways. On the day when school broke up and the theological student made them an unnecessarily solemn farewell address that impressed them all with a vague feeling that the day of doom was startlingly near, Al and Fred had loaded him down with their books. They were going away to Yale for four years, they told him, with an irrepressible ring of importance in their young voices, and by the time they got back they would have outgrown the old books. And the Colonel had bestowed a lot of good advice on him and had instanced many great men who had achieved renown with less of a foundation than he had to begin on. And Nellie had given him a very small and very hard pin-cushion made of little octagons of silk, lined with pasteboard, whose edges showed a solid phalanx of pinheads. It was a rigid sort of a cushion, nothing soft or yielding about it, conceived on a purely utilitarian basis and given in

a spirit of girlish consideration for some one less "well off " than herself.

"Cap" had taken the books, and the advice, and the pin-cushion, and returned his stolid, unemotional thanks without a break in his voice, while all the time he had been making violent efforts to swallow a big lump in his throat, and then he had gone back to the overseer's house and put the books on some shelves he knocked together from the sides of a dry-goods box, and had wrapped the hard little pin-cushion up in a piece of silver foil taken from his father's smoking tobacco. What he did with the Colonel's advice he could never clearly recall. He supposed those fellows that had done such big things on such slim foundations had lived where there was something to do, where there was something going on, and he didn't. He had found this much out from his books : the world was not bounded on the east by the Mississippi River, and its commerce was not confined to the loads of cotton-bales that his father shipped every fall to the city on the Colonel's behalf. Yes, he had learned that much. He had learned more. He had learned that there was something stirring within his own active young body that made him dissatisfied and restless and impatient of inactivity. He fancied a callow bird might experience some such sensation at watching the slow growth of its own helpless wings while longing for the coming of the test moment.

Would his test moment ever come ? How could it ? He saw no avenues of enterprise or effort, opening before him. He saw certain white men around him leading lives of luxurious ease, spending their days



and their substance in seeming security of their inexhaustibility. He saw certain other white men spending their days in unintellectual rounds of sordid responsibility. The sphere he was predestined to, involved rising before the faintest streak of dawn, hastily consuming a regular portion of hot cornbread and fried bacon and black coffee, before riding away to a monotonous supervision of plows that ran the same furrows over the same ground spring after spring, or hoes that must exercise the same painful precision every year in cutting out just so many tender cotton plants and leaving just so many others. It involved the coming home to a noon interim devoted to the issuing of so much meal and pork, or the distribution of so many plugs of black tobacco for "extra jobs." It involved the monotonous discussion of all the crops in the neighborhood with the other overseers, who would ride over of Sundays, and either dismount and fill the splint-bottom chairs that furnished the galleries or else compose themselves comfortably sidewise in their saddles to exhaust the budget of local gossip while their horses contentedly gnawed the projecting planks of the gallery floor into ragged fringes. He could never recall that these animated discussions had ever included any topics but the crops—who was in the grass, who was out of it, who had "sore shin" cotton and who hadn't—the condition of somebody's fence, and the prospect of every body being eaten up by worms—not the ultimate destiny of sinful mankind after interment, but the swift ruin to which it was liable at the hands, or the voracious mouths rather, of the cotton-worm.

Before those days at the big house, where he had sat behind the white muslin curtains that now seemed to shut him out from Paradise, and listened to the theological student reading Plutarch's Lives and commenting on them, these Sunday gatherings at the overseer's house had been social events toward which Cap had always looked forward with pleasurable anticipation. There was no Sunday-school to go to, and his mother was rigid in excluding him from his retinue of little darkies on that sacred day; it was the one religious rite she performed zealously. The talk of the men from the other plantations then had lent a flavor of variety to the day that had always been acceptable. But things were different now.

He wondered if it would be possible for him to get away from it and do something. He was not quite certain what. Of course the experiment would take a little money to start with. He would broach the subject. He did. He selected the day and hour disastrously. He sometimes wondered afterwards, if the result would have been different if he had made a happier choice of time. It made him feel like the merest puppet in the hands of fate. He had always stood in unreasonable awe of his father. The rôle of overseer did not give much play for the amenities of life, nor for the cultivation of the domestic graces, and he was accustomed to sit at table between a care-worn, anxious-faced woman at one end and a dark-browed, severely taciturn man at the other. He had no means of knowing, on the especial occasion he selected for casting the die so important to himself, that every thing had gone wrong with his father that day; that

the mule team had bogged in the woods with its eight bales of cotton, and the wagon had broken down under the strain, leaving its load in the muddy road instead of on the wharf-boat; that the belting that ran the gin-stands had been running off the pulleys in the most incomprehensible manner all day, and, worse than all, that the mules had broken fence the night before, and destroyed an incalculable amount of the standing corn. Fate maliciously decreed that on the heels of these vexations the overseer's son should make the mild request for enough money to leave home and try to make something for himself. His request simply provided a vent. He never repeated it. He ceased looking outward and forward for avenues that were unattainable even when he caught a glimpse of them.

In the after years, when his father died, his mother having gone before, the Colonel offered to make him his successor. He refused the offer with loathing. It was with bitter surprise that he found out how much money had been hoarded up all these years—money that might have unlocked the world to him in his ambitious days. He could gratify his desire to do something now if he chose. But the desire was dead. It was too late. He could not be the thing he wanted to be—he would not be what his father had been.

It was then that he opened up the little place for himself and went to live there alone. He took nothing from the old overseer's house but the rough shelves with the books on them that Al and Fred had given him. People said he was a good man to have in the county. He was always willing to do his

share in any thing that was for the public good. But he was "a queer fellow." He accumulated books faster than any thing else, and a traveling minister, who stopped at his house one night and at the Colonel's the next, declared emphatically that he was the best read man he'd ever met outside the walls of a college. Whenever strangers speak of Cap Sutton enthusiastically, the natives smile indulgently. They begin to value him as a sort of local curiosity that lends a tinge of interest to an otherwise monotonous landscape. "He is a character," according to them. In his own estimation he is a victim of a chance that was either too much or too little. He scarcely knows whether, if he should see a dug-out capsized with a scared wretch in it again, he would swim out to the rescue or not. He had not meant to be "heroic" when he did it, and he had been very severely punished for his reckless plunge into the cold water. He had been breasting cold waves ever since.

Once in a great while he rides over to Colonel Rafe's. He is a handsome spectacle on his big black horse. When he rode over the last time, Mrs. Rafe caught the new governess's eyes resting on him approvingly. It put an idea into her head.

Supposing Cap and the governess should make a match of it! She would make him get down to be introduced next time.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MISS FANNIE AND THE GIN BURNERS.

“IT was the slave owner’s fight, the rich man’s war. All the questions involved were of vital import to him alone who had something to lose. Why should the man who had never owned a slave or been burthened with a superfluous dollar be dragged into it, or go into it voluntarily?” Men engaged in a hand-to-hand contest with an adverse fate for daily subsistence are not the ones who find leisure or inclination for ethical hair-splitting, or for a daring disposition of large issues. The argument just quoted was the argument of idle malcontents. The man who did not own his slaves was without the charmed circle in the agricultural districts of the South unless he belonged to one of the learned professions, which were the bulwarks and pillars of the social fabric. Of course things were different in the cities. But as the leading social element there, the commission merchant, was, after all, but an offshoot of the leading social element in the country, a necessary outcome, as it were, of cotton-planting, the principle held good, and the man who was neither cotton-planter, doctor, lawyer, nor minister was very heavily handicapped, or would have been if the rivalry for social eminence had been as real a thing in that languorous atmosphere as

it is in colder climes, where a surplus of energy inspires more vigorous desires in that direction.

The man who had never owned his slave was curiously perhaps, at a discount with the negroes themselves. According to Sambo, he who had to labor with his own hands was a plebeian, unworthy of that ready deference the black man showed by instinct to the white man, upon whom nature had bestowed such visible supremacy. Their process of reasoning, for there was a substratum of reason in their antipathy for "po' w'ite trash," was more subtle than appears at the first glance. To the black man there was but one universal cause for his own physical, moral, and mental inferiority to the dominant class. It lay simply in the difference of color. To him the volumes devoted to arguments for or against his being an inferior sort of biped to the white, even the doubtful possessor of a soul endowed with like needs, were as if they had never been written or read. Sambo regarded this world from the low level of unenlightened materialism. It was a first-rate world, a sort of sublunary paradise, indeed, to the white man who lived on the fruits of his (Sambo's) labor. It was a jolly sort of world to Sambo himself after work hours, especially of Saturday nights, when the fiddle was scraping in the dance-house, or the pumpkins were ready to be stewed in black molasses, or cold weather revolved again with its matchless delights of spare-ribs and cracklin' bread. His life, if not spent on a flowery bed of ease, was minus that element of responsibility which is the thorn in so many an otherwise flowery bed. He was sure of being taken care of, and his one

concern was to see that his allotted daily task was well and promptly performed. But the man who had neither a master to take care of him, nor slaves to minister to his comfort, was a sort of abnormal creature, without any distinctive social status nor any especial place in the cosmos of Sambo's conceiving. This is why such men as Cap Sutton were the objects of a sort of contemptuous pity from him, that was irritating though innocuous. Holding, as he (Sambo) did, that the question of superiority was merely a question of white or black, and believing that if he could but slough his dark integument like a cocoon, he too might go through the glorious transfiguration that awaits the chrysalis, how could he feel otherwise than contemptuous towards the man who, given a white skin, remained by free choice a grub?

The independence of life led by the man who satisfied the crying needs of his body by marketing (by proxy always) the proceeds of his duck hunts, his seine fishing, his deer and bear excursions "back in the woods," did not appeal to any inborn sense of freedom in Sambo's breast. The desire for freedom was *not* inborn in the negro's breast. He had to be educated into appreciation of it, slowly and laboriously, after many years, and no greater proof of this fact could be given than the tender and unresentful reminiscences of his days of bondage which the ex-slave will pour into any listening ear. There was no sense of degradation commingled with his period of servitude. When the clarion cry of liberty first rang through the land, he listened to it with the dazed but listless curiosity of some wild creature suddenly aroused from

long and peaceful slumber. That it appealed to him individually, that it was a call to him to arise and gird up his loins for the battle of life, all undisciplined as he was, did not, happily for him, suggest itself. It might have appalled him if he had. Deeds of "derring do" were not in his line. Matters that dealt with guns and swords and pistols and free action on prancing horses were strictly within the white man's province, and Sambo could not conceive of any white man, especially a young and lusty white man, and more especially a young man who "cut such a dash on horseback" as Cap Sutton did, forbearing to don the gray. The earlier stages of the civil contest presented themselves in the light of grand equestrian displays, and it was only after the ranks of the cavalry had been filled to plethora that infantry service received its full meed of attention.

It was in view of this fact that Cap Sutton's big black horse "Othello" served as a text in the mouth of the only person privileged to preach to him. That was Aunt Ailsy.

When the overseer's son had made a little clearing in the heart of the tract of woodland which he had bought with his father's hoarded salary, and had built on it the small roughly weather-boarded house which was ample for his solitary occupancy, he had "knocked up" three still smaller shanties—one for a servant's house, one for a kitchen, and the other (with a "lean-to" for the hens), was Othello's optional retreat from wind and weather. When the time for Cap's removal to his little stumpy field of action came, an unexpected proffer of attendance came from Aunt Ailsy and her



husband, and he accepted it. It was Aunt Ailsy who made the proposition.

"You see, son, me en old Dave is ben 'bout w'ite folks too long now fur to settle down cumfubble wid de quarter niggers, en dis new overseer dat's comin' is got his own black folks pick out. Me en Dave's too ole t' suit 'im. Yo' ma was a rale good w'ite woman as ever live. She nuss me frew de cholery same lak I b'long t' her, en Dave too. I ben to de big house en tell Mars me en Dave ain' no 'count for fiel' work, en we 'lows to go long wid you, en I'll cook en ten' house fur you, en Dave, he'll mek yo' gyardin' en ten' 'Fello' fur you. En Mars, he says you's mouty out-settin' 'bout fusin' t' tek yo' pa's old place, but ef you keers to hev we, we kin go 'long wid you. Ailsy ain' forgit how yo' ma nuss her frew de cholery yit. So when you leave de old place you got to tek we 'long too." She said this knowing she would lose caste in the quarters, but Aunt Ailsy had an eye to the main chance.

And gradually, as the years had gone by, in which Cap Sutton had hunted, and fished, and read, and moodily philosophized about the social inequalities of this world, and had made occasional incursions into town for a fresh supply of smoking tobacco or powder or fishing-tackle [maintaining that somewhat surly intercourse with the men of the neighborhood that sprang from his sense of isolation], riding over still more rarely to Colonel Rafe's on Othello, whose shining black hide was a tribute to Dave's industry; Dave had cleared the little corn-field more and more from the black stumps, and had

raised wonderful crops of corn and sweet potatoes and pindars on it, and had come to feel quite like a bloated property-holder, so little did Cap interfere with him; and Aunt Ailsy had 'tended house and washed and mended for its easily pleased owner, and had planted cypress vines and purple beans about the little front gallery, and watched the outgoings and incomings of the overseer's son until her position had assumed the dignity of privy councilor. She was not without tact. Cap had certain moods and tenses which she had learned to read and respect, and, on the other hand, he had learned the signs that betokened surcharged emotion on Aunt Ailsy's part. He knew he had given quite a shock to her pride in him when the first regiment of cavalry had left the county without him. She had hovered about the room that night a long time after she had carried away the last of the tea things, and swept the brick hearth until not a fleck of the red dust clung to the brown straws, and had wiped the lamp-chimney with her apron until it shone again, and blown all the dust off his books with her vigorous lungs, and then stood irresolutely looking at him with that pathetic interest which almost always touched the heart of the "Solitary," as one of the romantic young ladies of the neighborhood had called him.

On that occasion he had laid down his brier-wood pipe and shut up his book to ask, "Well, old lady?"

"I see the soljers march to-day, son. Ol' mars' boys was wid 'em. Dey look real fine. Der worn' none uv 'm es good lookin' 'es you, nor Fello nuther"

(Aunt Ailsy could never cope with the Moor's name), "an' I 'lowed you ought to be 'long wid 'em. Ef you's a min' t' go, you needn't bother 'bout de house en yard, me en Dave 'll look arter things fur de little whiles you gone. I hear Mars' Al en' Mars' Freddie say it won't tek but little time to win' up dis foolishness. You en Fello would cut a dash, son, dress up dat way." Aunt Ailsy was profoundly ignorant of any political point at issue, trebly so of any moral point of personal concern to herself. Her relationship to the overseer's son, at whose birth she had officiated as wise woman, was analogous to Mammy's at the big house, only on a humbler scale. She was not able to grasp the subtleties that set him apart in his lusty young manhood from the youths and maidens of his own age, and resented that so fine an opportunity to show off himself and Othello should be lost through what seemed unnatural supineness on his part. Hence her efforts to stir the sluggish pulses of his patriotism into quicker action. It was a dismal failure. He had looked up at her with a certain narrowing of his large eyes as he said slowly :

"It's none of my fight, Aunt Ailsy. It's Fred and Al's quarrel. I wish 'em well out of it—that's all there is about it."

That was all there was about it, except, that as time went on and more and more men went out of the county to help settle the quarrel, and those who remained regarded him more and more sourly, resentful that so much of vigor should be retained from the ranks of the fighters, he withdrew more and more bitterly within himself, trying to forget the world that

was waging its fight of to-day over the issues of to-day in the bygone world and the finished fights and the dead issues that lived again for him between the leaves of his books, his only friends and comforters besides Aunt Ailsy and old Dave.

"Sutton's Clearing" was off the main road, and it was only by penetrating to it through a dense bit of woodland that it was reached. Small wonder then, as the distant war in Virginia drained the country of its sparse population, fewer and fewer feet turned aside from the big road attracted by the curling of the smoke from Cap Sutton's chimney or by the sound of Dave's ax-stroke. The links that bound him to this world seemed so few and frail that he wondered at himself in a sort of contemptuous surprise that he had not long ago given himself up as food for powder. True, there was an underlying principle in his staying at home, but no one knew of it, and if they did would have regarded it as just one more stain on his 'scutcheon. All that he knew of life he knew theoretically. There was nothing wrong in owning slaves that he could see. Doubtless, if he had been born at the big house, instead of at the overseer's house in the quarter lot, he would have been in hotter haste than Fred or Al had been to spring to the defense of his rights. But having nothing at stake, he had been better qualified for looking at the question all around, and in his unaided judgment he had decided that the precedent of secession was a bad one. He took no high moral grounds. He was quite sure that the white people of his section were making a mistake, but in his aloofness he often grew so mor-

bidly disgusted with inaction that he was half-tempted to throw himself into the thing on one side or the other, just to end the never-ending discussion over it that his own reason waged against his own belligerent instincts. He was so absolutely sure that there was not the faintest tinge of cowardice in his soul that he never considered vindication necessary on that score.

Into this scene of moral and physical isolation a small personality was intruded late one afternoon as he paced restlessly up and down the rough planks of his little gallery with his shapely brown hands clutching at the lapels of his jeans coat. It was 'Mandy, 'Mandy, who had belonged soul and body to the governess over at Colonel Rafe Sutton's ever since that first night of acquaintanceship that had resulted in a midnight turmoil in 'Mandy's awakened conscience. . Not that what she had insisted upon calling "gitten religion" had had an appreciable effect upon 'Mandy outwardly, unless, indeed, in a short-lived resolution not to countenance the Saturday evening's dance at the quarters, or in a lugubrious inclination to groan aloud on subsequent occasions whenever the governess had been reading to her of nights from the Bible ; but 'Mandy, being fully satisfied of her own regeneration, was correspondingly devoted to the agent of that regeneration, and the girl from Boston found herself, the virtual possessor of at least one devoted slave.

On the occasion in question 'Mandy had been intrusted with a very delicate mission, so delicate that the governess had drilled her ambassadress by word of

mouth, fearful of involving some one else in trouble if she should commit her message to paper.

Cap stopped in his aimless tread of the responsive planks to look amazedly at 'Mandy when she first appeared. She had emerged suddenly from the close ranks of the trees, plunging her ashy bare heels vigorously into the left flank of an unhappy-looking mule, who hung his head in dejected consciousness of his own absurd appearance.

'Mandy had captured him with some difficulty in the broad open corn-field where the cockle-burrs had disputed supremacy with the neglected grain and grown rankly up to the time of their ripening, which was the time of confusion for every thing that split the hoof. 'Mandy's mule bristled with masses of the brown clinging burrs. Its tail stood rigidly out, in one unyielding mass of them. Across its bare back she had flung an old gunny-sack, and between its unwilling jaws she had thrust the rusty snaffle-bit to her rope bridle. The exertion of urging her steed to its utmost speed had disarranged her draperies somewhat, and her head-handkerchief was prevented from parting company with her head altogether by a vicious grip of its fluttering ends, which she maintained with her strong white teeth.

Cap watched her with a grim smile as she clambered down over the rail fence, on top of which she dismounted and to whose "rider" she attached her burry mule. 'Mandy was affected with no false modesty touching her burr-proof ankles, of which she made unblushing exhibition before she alighted on the ground, and ran nimbly toward the

gallery with a face full of importance, tying her bandanna afresh as she ran.

"Miss Fannie say I was to git yhere in a hurry," she said, projecting her eager voice in advance of her scurrying feet, "en she say I was to ax you did you know de gin burners was 'bout ag'in?"

"Gin burners! Fools!"

He stopped amazedly. He knew that six months before nearly every gin in the lower part of the county had been burned by order of a man who had gone out in command of one of the earlier companies, and who enunciated the remarkable theory that the sooner every bale of cotton was destroyed the quicker the struggle would end, quite as if the contest were being waged for or against material benefits on either side rather than for a deathless principle. He knew that the hoarded and hidden substance of many a man who had lost his all besides, and who was clinging to his hidden cotton as a future resource against actual want, had been discovered and consigned to the flames. He supposed that phase of madness had passed away and the frenzied ebullition of patriotism which had dictated it had long since subsided; but here was 'Mandy, ragged and barefooted, panting out her startling information of its revival as dictated by the governess with an earnestness which compelled credence. She was elated withal:

"Yas, siree, dey is dat, en Miss Fannie tol' me t' tell you she skeered t' write, fear somebody mout tek de letter from me, but I lak t' see de man could tek a letter from me (rising inflection). I

chaw em up fus'." (Whether the letter, or the intermeddler was to be "chawed up," 'Mandy did not stop to explain.) "En Miss Fannie, she say, she 'lowed ef you knowed how much trouble de w'ite folks at de big house was in, mebbe you'd try to holp 'em some. En she say as how I was t' tell you she heern de gin burners would be dar dis' ve'y night, en po' Mars Conel he down wid tiphone fever, en Mars Al—he daid, en Miss Nellie she don' do nuthin' but cry, en cry, en cry."

Yes, he had known it all. But what could he do? He had felt several times since hearing of Al's death as if it was a sort of pity that it hadn't been himself instead, but somehow or other things never did work quite right in this world. He had been very fond of Al. He was a manly, straightforward fellow, with no rich man's nonsense about him. True he, Cap, remembered smiling a trifle scornfully when he had heard about the dressing-gown and the darkey valet Al had started out with as part of his soldier's outfit; but he had died a hero's death for all that, and he knew that the big house that had once been opened to him to give him a chance had been the scene of bitter mourning since. And he knew that, all things being equal, life could have furnished him no sweeter duty than to have comforted Miss Nellie, Al's sister, and to have wiped every tear from her eyes; but the gulf between him and the people at the big house had been widening every year, until now they seemed to live in another planet, so distant that it seemed presumption even for fancy to penetrate into its rarified atmosphere. Yes, he knew all about the troubles that had



overtaken the Colonel in his old age. But what could he do? What did this wide-awake governess over at his cousin Rafe's mean by sending her ragged ambassadress to notify him? 'Mandy stood before him, with her claw-like hands hanging limply down by her side, and her thick lips slightly apart. There was a mild flavor of the immortal Casabianca in her attitude of sturdy patience. Her bead-black eyes scanned his face eagerly. She would not go without some word of response for her darling Miss Fannie. The overseer's son flung it at her presently, and she snapped at it as a patient dog snaps at the long-awaited-for morsel in mid-air:

"Tell her I'll see what I can do."

"Yaas, sir." 'Mandy's glittering teeth closed over the words with a snap, and turning about without even the ceremony of a courtesy, she clambered once more over the rail fence, with the agility of a monkey, and was soon again plunging her bare heels into the leathern sides of her mule.

It was scarcely an hour later when Othello went crashing over the same ground. Cap had only waited long enough to see that the beast had consumed his last ear of corn and had been well-watered. If it were ever a choice between his going hungry and thirsty or Othello's suffering, there would have been no doubt about the choice. While Othello had been consuming his rations with unfeeling deliberation, he had been examining the condition of the big navy revolvers that always hung in their black holsters on the nail behind his bed's head, and putting a fresh charge into the shotgun that stood in the cor-

ner of the room hidden by the armoire. It was dark when he and Othello plunged into the woods, but they needed no sense of sight to guide them over the familiar path. It was darker still when they found themselves in front of the gleaming white fence that outlined the Colonel's handsome yard premises against the rest of the plantation. He could see lights burning dimly in the different rooms of the house as he cantered slowly by. He reined his big black horse into a slower gait when he came in sight of the big house. He must ride past it, through the old quarter lot, by the overseer's house, where he had first seen the light, to reach the threatened gin-house. For one fleeting second nature asserted her supremacy, and he gave himself up to a passion of longing for one glimpse of the sweet girl-face, whose pure patrician outlines had dwelt with him vividly all through the lonely years of his useless manhood. It was vouchsafed him :

A lurid glare ! A tongue of upward-leaping flame, and the big house stood revealed as in the broadest sunlight. He stuck his sharp spurs fiercely into Othello's flanks. The black horse leaped forward with a snort of surprise and indignation. His rider cast one upward look at the little room with the dormer window where he had gone to meet his chance. The curtains were drawn aside, and framed in by the dark woodwork was a white startled face, illumined by the dancing flames up yonder beyond the quarter lot. Again and again the sharp rowels were plunged into Othello's smoking flanks, while the flecks of white foam from his bit-tortured mouth flew back on

his glossy sides. Cap Sutton rode like a madman that night. His experienced eye had located the flames at once. It was not the Colonel's gin. It was Marsden's. They would reach the Colonel's next. How he was to save it he could not conceive. These men came armed with the authority of the military. This destruction of private property was condoned under the head of military necessity. But whatsoever one man could do to defy the many, that he proposed to do.

As he galloped through the quarters he gathered around him once more his motley following. They were freed men now. But they were docile and biddable still. They caught the inspiration of his fiery glance and ringing voice. He paused in their midst long enough to shout :

"Boys, if you'll stand by me, we'll save the old man's gin for him yet. He's suffered and sacrificed his share already. Think of Al!"

Then he plunged forward in the direction of the dark mass of brick and wood brought prominently into view by the flames that were consuming its neighbor. The crops of two years were piled up under its capacious roof. There was no place to ship it to. There was no one to buy it. With the speed of an experienced campaigner, Cap drew a dark cordon about the gin. He had not much faith in his untried forces, but, after all, the whole thing was a desperate chance. Then he faced Othello in the direction the gin burners must come from and waited only a little while. They came galloping briskly presently. Theirs was no act of mere incendiarism. They were doing what they had

been commanded to do: "Theirs not to question why."

Then Cap Sutton had recourse to the emotional for the first time in his blunt life. He faced them promptly, and reminded them of all the old man, lying sick at the house yonder, had already given up to the cause they too were battling for. He appealed to their own sense of justice to defend the Colonel's property. His right to stop them was sharply challenged. His name was curtly demanded.

"Sutton"—he gave it sullenly. He knew it carried no prestige with it.

"Sutton!" It was repeated with a brutal laugh of scorn. "The overseer's son, that's been skulking in the woods ever since the fight begun!"

There were no words known to Cap's vocabulary that could answer this taunt. There was a flash and another and another, then a confused sound of galloping horses' feet, and Othello, riderless, was among them.

. . . "What a mercy it was," Mrs. Rafe Sutton said to her husband on the night when she had the proud pleasure of receiving the Colonel and his wife under her roof for the first time, "that Cap had enough breath left in his body that night to tell the folks to bring him here instead of to the Colonel's. If it hadn't been for her nursing him through that time, Cap never would have found out what a good wife Miss Fannie could make, and he'd 'a' lived and died alone in that shanty in the woods. Now look at him."

"It was a lucky thing he had that little pin-

cushion in his vest pocket," Colonel Rafe Sutton answered meditatively. "The doctor says it was the bullet's hittin' it and glancin' that saved him and sent the ball meant for his heart into his rib. But Cap always was a lucky dog ; and he's got a stunner of a wife."

It was gratitude for the saving of many thousands of dollars' worth of property and his stately gin-house that brought the Colonel and his soft-voiced wife in person to grace the wedding-feast of Cap Sutton and Miss Fannie. When they went back home to the big house they told the story of the little silk pin-cushion that had been the means of saving his life. The Colonel's daughter flushed faintly at her mother's prolix description of the cushion, which Mrs. Rafe had surreptitiously displayed, no one knew exactly why. But Cap always thought the little cushion had wiped out all his scores against the big house.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### DAVENPORT'S.

EVERYBODY knew where Davenport's was, and everybody made pilgrimages to it in the hour of need. No matter whether the need took the form of a spool of sewing silk or iron castings for gin stands — somewhere among Davenport's heterogeneous stock it was sure to be found. "Davenport's" displayed no sign. It was proudly independent of any such factitious aids to prominence. As well label the county Court House as plaster a sign on Davenport's time-honored front. There was but one court house and but one Davenport's, and honors were easy between them in Slowville. Furthermore (apropos of a sign) human ingenuity would have been staggered to compose any inscription for a sign that would have been even measurably descriptive of the olla podrida on Davenport's shelves. (There was a Davenport, also, but as he is merely incidental to "Davenport's," he can bide his time for an introduction. Davenport's would have been Davenport's if Davenport had been completely effaced).

Considering its intensely utilitarian character, it was not an unpicturesque-looking object, with its gray and moss-grown shingle roof, and its broad plaza in front, shaded by Prides of China whose purple

blossoms scented the air in the spring-time and whose yellow balls tempted the robins to the crime of drunkenness in the winter time. The Prides of China were all boxed about to protect them from the nibbling propensities of the horses and mules that congregated thickly about Davenport's every Saturday and on mail days ; and when their dark, glossy foliage was at its fullest, and the boxes had received their spring whitewashing, the long, low gallery that skirted the store on two sides afforded the pleasantest rendezvous in all Slowville.

In the absence of a local newspaper, Davenport's served as an advertising medium, and its weather-boarded sides were plastered thickly over with written placards of neighborhood interest. By attention to these bulletins the public was made aware that Ben Forest would soon be along with a fresh lot of mules and Texas ponies for sale ; that divine service would be held in the Court House by the Rev. Samuel Patterson, on the third Sunday in April ; that Colonel Raymond's Alderney bull was missing (accompanying the announcement, an accurate and prolix description of the estray) ; that the election for county officers would take place the first week in November, and so on through the entire list of matters pertaining to public interest. Whosoever was behind the times in Slowville had only himself to thank for not consulting the exterior of Davenport's. How could a man grow insulated and selfish when he was compelled to absorb matters of common interest in such a sociable fashion ? Your town man, who reads his evening's paper in the luxurious privacy of his own library, possesses him-

self dumbly of the harrowing details of his nearest neighbor's ruin or disgrace, and when he folds his newspaper up and lays it aside, is likely to fold his sympathy up and lay it aside also ; but the man who could come in contact with any thing that touched his neighbor's welfare in the placards at Davenport's must perforce share the information and his views concerning it with the fellow who was reading it over his shoulder, or that other fellow who had just stepped aside in order to give him a chance at it.

Thus community of interest was engendered, and in the multitude of counsel judicious decisions were approached if not always reached. Davenport himself was a sort of impartial sphinx, who never gave an opinion on any subject. He was not going to have the peaceful neutral ground of his store-gallery disturbed by contending partisans under shelter of any "leanings" he might show.

If the specialist must, by reason of regarding a single object from his chosen point of view, grow narrow concerning objects outside that restricted visual line, then Davenport, by an inverse proposition, was forced into a broad groove which he may not have originally been designed for.

As an important personage he ranked next to the doctor. There were lawyers in Slowville, of course, lawyers who lived there and slowly batten on the mild misdeeds of their fellows, but then they were lawyers only. "Davenport" (I give the local argument) "could have beat 'em all hollow if he'd taken to Blackstone instead of merchandising." By absorption he had become a sort of com-



pendium of common law and statute. He had never missed a trial at the court house in Slowville for twenty years. In minor disputes, when the decision of an umpire was preferred to the fierce wrangle of contesting attorneys, Davenport was pretty sure to be selected for that onerous but honorable position. It was a rare thing for his decisions to be set aside upon appeal. But amateur "lawyering" was only one of Davenport's phases. "On a pinch, Davenport could preach a pretty good sermon." Not that preaching was in his line ; but he saw more of the visiting ministers than any man in Slowville did. That was because of his open-handed hospitality.

Back of the great gray two-story wooden structure, known as "Davenport's," was a tiny little white house sitting low on the ground behind its great tall rose and pomegranate and spirea bushes, almost as tall as trees, and in the tiny little white house was crowded all of luxury and refinement and neatness and cheerfulness that are needed for a perfect home, and over it all presided the prettiest woman in Slowville, and people said that a large part of Davenport's hospitality was the outcome of inordinate pride in his wife.

He could not endure that any stranger of distinction should pass through Slowville without sharing the hospitality of the little house behind the pomegranates and doing homage to its presiding deity. There were two dainty "spare rooms" under its roof, and one of these had come to seem quite like a home to the Rev. Samuel Patterson during his Slowville ministrations. This is how Davenport be-

came the recipient of more than his share of the doctrine apportioned to his neighborhood by the reverend gentleman.

In the evenings, after the store was closed, nothing pleased its owner better than to hurry across the ugly store yard, strewn thickly with empty meal barrels and drygoods boxes, through a wicket gate, into that other yard, so unlike it, where the violet beds stretched along both sides of the bright red brick walk straight up to the low gallery, only two steps to mount ; then to make a hurried toilet, and to settle down for what he called a "theological bout with parson," while "the wife" (Davenport always designated his wife by the definite article) sat close at hand, divided in attention between the basque she was wrestling with by the aid of a "fashion" journal, and the discussion she only partially comprehended. It was the gist of these discussions, given at second hand, that won for Davenport such high polemical distinction among those of his customers whose opportunities had been less broad.

There was a table in the hall of the little white house that was an overloaded receptacle for periodicals, and fashion-books, and circulars, etc., etc. The names on the wrappers were as various as their contents. In stricter latitudes Mrs. Davenport's opportunities for keeping up with the modes and with the current literature of the day would have been summarily curtailed by the irate representatives of the names on the wrappers she slipped off and on with dexterity and impunity. As it was, every body knew and nobody cared. The post-office (as represented

by a square box full of labeled pigeon-holes, sitting on one end of one of the counters) was at Davenport's, and as he knew to a minute, almost, when the slow-moving messenger on his slow-moving mule from each plantation would make his semi-weekly demand for mail matter, there was no harm in giving Fanny a peep at them while they would be lying in the pigeon-holes. Of course she never cut any leaves. She wouldn't be so dishonorable.

On mail days, the activity was always great in the region of Davenport's. The long rack under the rain-shed on one side of the plaza would be crowded thick with animals, ranging from the handsome thoroughbred of the Colonel, with its blue and white check saddle blanket and its costly English saddle, down to the harness-scarred mule, with its rope bridle and its folded gunny-sack intervention between its barefoot rider and its own ridgy spinal column. Within the cool shade of the Prides of China, the spanking buggy bays of Benny Mayo stood side by side with the stolid oxen, whose slowly heaving flanks told of the many miles that intervened between them and their own drinking trough.

Mail day was Davenport's harvest day, but matters within the store must be pressing indeed to force Davenport himself behind the counter. He looked curiously out of place weighing plug tobacco or drawing a quart of black molasses in payment for a dozen eggs. There was a totally irreconcilable incongruity between him and his surroundings. He had the build of an athlete, and was one, without any scientific training. His

head, superbly shaped, and set squarely on a columnar throat, was covered thickly with a yellow mass of short curls, and his chin with a long, silky beard of the same color. His eyes were blue and bright and penetrating. A pure Saxon type was Davenport, with a general suggestion of great physical strength and deliberate purpose about him.

If the gray store with its assured income had not come to him by inheritance, doubtless he would have done something with himself in the world. As it was, he shirked the tobacco box and the molasses barrel whenever practicable, and in the long summer days, when there was not much doing, he read Keats and Coleridge with oblivious delight on the long store gallery, fighting flies with one hand all the while. He had never been away from home to school, "couldn't be spared from the store." He had grown up in it, but had never grown into it. Hidden somewhere in that muscular organism of his was a dumb unsatisfied longing for better things to do and to be than fate had so far accorded him.

When the war broke out it was with an envious pang he saw other fellows go off to the field. He would have loved to go with them, but, looking his duty squarely in the face by the best light he had, there seemed to be a stronger call to stay at home. The lines had not fallen to him in heroic places. There was no heroism in staying behind, when every man that could shoulder a musket was hurrying away. Indeed, odium was his portion, and he knew it and accepted it in that mute fashion of his which left so

much to conjecture. When it came to his ears that Randolph Fairfax said, "Davenport was afraid to join the army for fear that yellow beard of his might get powder-scorched," Davenport's blue eyes flashed lightning, and he clutched the yellow beard in question as if he would have plucked it out and cast it from him, but no words came.

No one had ever given him credit for state-craft among his many qualifications, or for any particular amount of foresight. He never took any credit to himself in that line, or indeed in any other line, only, it was his serious conviction from the very first that the war was to be no holiday affair. But what right had he, a tame stay-at-home, to entertain or express an opinion on such tremendous issues? No right at all. The gatherings at Davenport's grew slimmer and slimmer, as one by one the gallery frequenters doffed their broad-brimmed slouch hats for trim gold-laced caps, and their planters' suits of cottonade or jeans, for the gray that covered them with glory as with a mantle, until there was but a sorry showing—only Mr. Munroe, who kept a few drugs and a lot of gilt-edged old-fashioned stationery in a poor little shop at the other end of town; Mr. Lawless, a Britisher, who made his hay while the sun shone on him exclusively, by buying up cotton on speculation; Dr. Fuller, who was an octogenarian; and himself, so tall, so stalwart, and so redundantly healthy that he was ashamed to think of what a superior quality of food for powder he was withholding from the cause. Women whose husbands had gone to the army, looked at him loweringly, and indulged freely in per-

fect frenzies of patriotism whenever they found themselves in the presence of Davenport's wife. Mothers whose sons were languishing in camp, spoke with bitter resentment of their heroism as contrasted with his lack of it.

He was much given to going about the country on horseback in those early days of the war, and scant courtesy was his portion under many a roof where he stopped for a dinner or a supper in that matter-of-course way which was the custom of the land. No one refused the dinner or the supper or the night's lodging, but it was given with unsmiling civility.

Rumors got afloat that Davenport was speculating ! Speculating in the hour of his country's peril ! Speculating in provisions at that ! A new sort of trade was inaugurated in the gray old store, that stood where the one street of Slowville crossed the long lane that led by a rough corduroy road back into the interior of the country. It was rumored that Davenport was trading in the most peculiar manner—bartering the dry-goods and the crockery and cutlery and glass-ware that made such a fine show on his shelves, for meal and corn and bacon, but refusing to dispose of a pound of any thing eatable on any terms. The old store filled up with provisions, they overflowed into the back-shed rooms that had been kept for hay and oats in ante-bellum days ; they piled up until the second story, that had always been kept sacred as a Masonic Lodge, was invaded by barrels of potatoes and festooned with sides of bacon. And still Davenport careered over the country, securing every thing that could be eaten, and stowing it away in loft

or cellar of the store behind the Prides of China. No one questioned his right to monopolize this produce business. Indeed, there was no one to question it—only a lot of helpless women and children and thriftless darkies, who wondered idly what he was driving at. He grew into a monster in local estimation. His staying out of the army had secured him the contempt of the neighborhood ; his busy, earnest speculation excited its disgust and horror. Even in the little house behind the pomegranate bushes there were clouds and distrust. Davenport's wife was no longer proud of him. She hung her head for him, and he knew it—knew it, and winced under it silently, and thought enviously of the men who were off with the army, fighting and being wounded. He would gladly have exchanged his wounds for theirs.

When the river was blockaded and all the country on both sides of the Mississippi, from Vicksburg to New Orleans, was virtually in a state of siege, people said : " Now Davenport's hour of triumph had come," and those who had been most open in denouncing him recalled their rash words regretfully. What they had said was all true, of course, but it had better have been left unsaid, for in all the country nowhere but at Davenport's were medicines, or sugar, and tea, and meal, and every thing that went to sustain life, to be procured. The grinders ceased grinding and the great mill wheels stood motionless. The ungathered crops remained in the fields, at the mercy of marauding cattle. A universal paralysis seized upon the land. Pallid-faced women asked, what next ?

Yes, Davenport's hour of triumph had come ! He

did not call it his hour of triumph. He simply said that had befallen which he had known all along must come. Then, judiciously, wisely, patiently, he began his ministrations, meting out comfort of a material sort with the stern impartiality of a judge on the bench, and the patient tenderness of a Joseph yearning over his suffering brethren.

Nothing that led to the relief of necessity was too remote for his far-reaching grasp, nothing too minute to secure his attention. Without price he gave up his hoarded substance, and long after white sugar became a luxury too costly for consumption on the table in the little white cottage, Randolph Fairfax's wife had it on hers.

There had been no one to help him bear the burden of the obloquy that had been his share, and now, when the women who had so misjudged him crowded about him with wordy recantations, he smiled at them inscrutably, and they were comforted. They said among themselves: "He took it so lightly, he had never cared much." Not much—you see there wasn't the making of a hero in him. All the glory was reserved for the men who had gone away in uniform.

It was in the third year of the war that Randolph Fairfax came home wounded. Not badly, but he had fought splendidly and was entitled to a short respite. He tried hard to say something handsome and grateful to Davenport about the way he had looked after his wife and children during his own absence in the army, and he sincerely hoped those sharp and foolish words of his about Davenport's beard had died from his memory. They had not—he felt quite sure of it,



when Davenport, resting his blue eyes calmly on him for a moment, turned slowly on his heel and began giving directions about a kit of mackerel that was to be sent to old Mrs. Murray back in the Red Lick settlement. Fairfax did not come to the store any more after that, but remained closely at home on the plantation—so closely that he did not hear what Davenport heard one morning from the trembling lips of one of Fairfax's own freed slaves.

What Davenport heard was that a posse of the enemy was going to raid the neighborhood that night to capture Major Fairfax; he would be a prisoner well worth their efforts. It was with Davenport to warn the Major of his danger. There was no one to whom he could intrust the task. The long lonely gallop through the woods and across the swollen sloughs and over the weed-grown fields must be taken by himself. It was accomplished safely, and at a slower pace he turned his tired horse's head homeward. He would have liked to travel faster, for Fanny would be worrying about his not getting home before dark, but he must have some mercy on the jaded beast under him. Thank God, Fairfax would have plenty of time to escape, if he started right off. It was dark, quite dark, when he passed from the shelter of the trees that marked the boundary line of Fairfax's place out into the big road—so dark that he did not see a motionless group of horsemen drawn across his pathway until his own horse shied violently to one side and the single word "Halt!" fell commandingly on his ears.

"Fairfax's captors!" He had only time to think it,

when the same commanding voice called questioningly to him from out the gloom, "Who goes there?"

"Randolph Fairfax," came back clearly, unfalteringly, defiantly. A gurgle of laughter, or rather a chorused chuckle of triumph, and then he was completely surrounded as the posse hurried him forward away from Slowville.

It was not of himself that he was thinking as he galloped through the somber woods with his captors that night. It was of the wife, of Fanny, watching and wondering and weeping through the long hours alone. It was time he was bearing his share of hardships. If it was not for her, he wouldn't mind. Perhaps, when light came, they'd give him a chance to write back to her. He couldn't have done differently. Fairfax was crippled and poorly mounted. These fellows were on well-fed army horses. It wouldn't have done to risk the truth. On and on through the night, until, in the gray dawn of the day, camp was reached: a brief respite, and then he found himself on board a transport. It would be easy enough when he got to head-quarters to satisfy the general in command that he was no military man, but a law-abiding civilian, staying at home and pursuing his usual avocations.

When he got to head-quarters and made his statement his blue eyes fairly flashed lightning to find it discredited. His interlocutor's skeptical gaze traveled slowly down one of Davenport's shapely legs and up the other. Davenport's own gaze followed wonderingly and his brown cheeks turned ashen white. He

told all about it after his release from Alton military prison at the close of the war.

"It was those confounded red stripes down the side of my pants that Fanny was so proud of. You see, I had been in the saddle and out of reach of buying any new pants until I was about out of 'em. Then Fanny cut up her traveling shawl, and, considered as the work of an amateur, those pants were a success, if I did have to go into a corner and turn round three times before I could get my hand into my pocket; but she left the bordering of the shawl in for a fancy touch. Poor Fanny! I suppose she thought she'd make me look like a soldier whether or no, and it did the business for me. It was more than I could do to convince those fellows I wasn't a major-general at the very least, instead of a poor stay-at-home skulk. You know our boys weren't much of dandies after the first year."

The gallery at Davenport's is once more a crowded rendezvous, and war yarns alternate with crop and polemical discussions; but whenever the heroes of Slowville begin to blow reminiscent trumpets, Davenport retires within, for if Randolph Fairfax is about, his (Davenport's) midnight ride with the raiders is sure to come up, and no one knows better than he that he doesn't even deserve honorable mention.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE BOY AND THE BAYOU.

“THEY didn’t believe it was in him.” “There was more come out in Gus Woodson than in any boy that had ever been raised about Bayou Pierre.” (Nothing is ever reared in that locality.) “The war had been the making of him.” “He’s grit through and through.”

That is the way they talk about him now. Public opinion, in the neighborhood of Bayou Pierre, has undergone several changes on the subject of Gus Woodson since he came back to the county from that expensive and useless trip to Europe which he took as a sort of educational supplement, of which he could report nothing more interesting than having seen a man “making jugs.” In the earlier stages of his career public opinion had been decidedly at variance with itself about him. From the utilitarian point of view, he seemed so entirely superfluous. It really seemed as if his father had sent him to Europe from college because there was nothing else to do with him. The plantation didn’t need him. What with his father and two older brothers at home, and the overseer in the quarters and the foreman in the field, life was of necessity a sinecure to Gus Woodson,

From an æsthetic stand-point he did better. He made pleasing landscape effects, mounted on his merlesome bay (between whom and himself there seemed a perpetual contest for mastery), or else striding actively across fields, in his chocolate-colored corduroy hunting suit, with its big silver buttons, his gun swung across his shoulders, and his well-trained hundred-dollar lemon-colored setter trotting decorously at his heels. He was a handsome young fellow. It was with purely amateurish interest that he rode over the growing crops, or halted his restless horse near the gin house, where the whirr of the big leathern bands and the drip, drip of the fuzzy seed from the carrier to the mountain of waste outside bespoke the busy season on the plantation. He was always a trifle impatient for the last lock of cotton to be picked from the rigid brown stalks, for then he was at liberty to have a lot of fellows up from the city to hunt the partridges that confidingly nested and reared their young with impunity under cover of the growing crops. As a general thing it was a trifle slow for him on the place, and he escaped from it as often as was practicable. It was oftenest practicable about the time of the fall races on the Metairie course, out beyond the shell-road in New Orleans, or when the crowds of summer idlers grew thickest, at the White Sulphur Springs, in Virginia. He was most partial to home in the spring-time, when the trout and the striped bass and the speckled sun-perch held full conventions under the dark waters of Bayou Pierre, doubtless devising measures of protection against their common enemy, man, or else foolishly betraying themselves by

lofty tumblings that would carry them clear out of the water with a flash of rainbow tints, only to fall back with a softly-repentant splash. When the fish were "jumping," Gus was in his element. As an organizer of fish fries he was unsurpassed. Your native Bayou Pierrian could not easily be persuaded to eat his first trout or bass of the season in conventional stupidity or stupid conventionality, with his legs under his own or any body else's mahogany. It would take all the pleasure out of the sport and all the flavor out of the fish not to catch, cook and consume it without change of location.

What other use did Bayou Pierre ever serve? What else was it created for, with its cool, dark, slow-running current, its tree-shaded and vine-tangled banks, its fallen monarchs of the wood spanning its close-lying shores, making natural bridges, that were carpeted with the tenderest green mosses and made desirable points for pretty girls to stand on and pose with long fishing-rods in their hands and the desire for conquest in their hearts? From the utilitarian point of view Bayou Pierre was quite as superfluous as Gus Woodson. It was not needed for purposes of irrigation. It was not navigable even for the tiniest canoe, with its picturesque obstructions of mossy logs, whereon myriads of brown turtles sunned themselves on sunny days. It was in itself an impediment to travel, either having to be circumvented tediously and circuitously, or else crossed on untrustworthy bridges that swayed perilously beneath the foot of man or beast, and yet no one in all the country-side about Bayou Pierre would have dispensed with it, or with Gus Woodson

either. Each was to the Bayou Pierre folk what nothing or nobody else could possibly have been. "You knew exactly where to find them both."

One would have as soon expected a false statement or a mean sentiment to drop from Gus Woodson's lips as for the Bayou Pierre to yield up a draught of carp in the hand-net that had been dipped into its bosom for minnows or "needles." Both were suspected of latent and unsuspected reserves of power. Both moved placidly forward in the current determined for them by a higher power, until—well.

The Bayou Pierre flowed sluggishly, sleepily, uselessly on through the short gray November days, when the vines on its banks grew golden and scarlet and russet, and the rabbits rustled the dead branches of the blackberry bushes noisily as they stole down to the water's brink to slake their thirst ; on, sluggishly, sleepily, uselessly, through the bright spring-days, when the fish leaped with short-lived joy from its depths, and the painted corks bobbed and ducked and danced on its bosom, and the sound of merry voices waked the echoes on its banks ; on, sluggishly, sleepily, uselessly, through the long still summer days, when the elder bushes shed their lace-like petals in a creamy shower on its glassy breast, and the katydids droned drowsily in the tall trees that circled it round about, and the soft hum of myriad insects filled the air ; until—well—the river levees broke one day and the mad waters that had been foaming and tearing and raging at the feeble barrier for so long came leaping and bounding into the quiet little bayou and gave it something to do. Then the Bayou Pierre asserted itself

in a fiercely rebellious fashion, and all the power that had lain dormant so long flashed into existence and carried it forever beyond the narrow banks, and beyond the quiet limitations of its peace-begirt days.

In like fashion, Gus Woodson, in his peace-begirt days, moved placidly forward in the luxurious groove he found himself appointed to, sleepily, sluggishly, uselessly, until—well——. People smiled indulgently when they heard *how* Gus Woodson had gone to the war. He had gone forth at the first call, gayly, joyously, luxuriously, a led horse and a valet only a degree less splendid than himself in his new gray suit forming part of his outfit. The point of the valet had given rise to serious discussion in the home circle. Of course Gus went out as a cavalryman, and however was he to get his horse curried unless he took Sandy along with him? He had a general impression that military discipline was very rigid in the matter of well-cared-for beasts, and irreproachable carbines, and Sandy knew more about currying a horse and cleaning a carbine than he could ever hope to learn [in a lifetime. Plainly Sandy was a military necessity, as essential an article of his camp equipage as the mosquito bar and the brass-mounted dressing-case, which were included in his list of indispensables, along with a miscellaneous collection of meerschaums. What a day that was at the big house when they were all helping to get him off! It seemed to be an accepted theory that whatever he was lacking when he left the shelter of home, he must do without for the natural term of his existence. And, you know, he had



never learned how to do without any thing. The excitement in the Vicar of Wakefield's house when Moses was about to make his perilous exploration of the outer world was as nothing to it. The old-fashioned saddle-bags that were swung behind Sandy's saddle swelled ever bigger and bigger with contributions of woolen comforters, little morocco "house-wives" with his initials embroidered on the silk lining in hair; tobacco bags of silk, lustrous with floss embroidery, socks and mittens galore. Gus Woodson, in his useless days, had contrived to accumulate many and ardent friendships. Very much seemed to be taken out of the neighborhood when he went. Every body liked him, "in spite of his nonsense." It was when rumors began to come back to them of his patient endurance of camp discipline, his readiness to discharge the most perilous duty, and his "dash" as a cavalryman, that public opinion began to veer, and the most contracted utilitarian on Bayou Pierre admitted that in the economy of the ages even the Gus Woodsons of this world may find a place. There were detractors who said, "That was about all he was fit for," and that "to career over the country with a carbine on his shoulder, and his legs astride a good piece of horseflesh, was just in Gus Woodson's line." Nevertheless, local pride in him went up and steadily up; and then people began to pity him for what he would have to come back to. For, whichever way things went, Gus Woodson's home-coming must be a very sad one. The crisis was very imminent when Bayou Pierre began to admit the possibility implied in the expression "whichever way things went."

Things had gone badly enough at the Woodsons' ever since Gus had been in the army. The old man seemed to lose his grip after the boys went away. There didn't seem to be much left for the old people to live for. The plantation was too far away. The time came when it was hard to get a word from the seat of war. Perhaps if they moved into town, they might hear from the boys oftener. They were no use on the place. Things had all gone to the dogs. Maybe if they were nearer the river, they might the easier catch those floating rumors, which were all the aliment afforded so many hungry and aching hearts. The plantation was no longer like home. "Any thing might happen to them there."

So the big house was deserted and the old folks moved into town for the sake of that company which it is said misery loves. And when the neighbors they had left behind in the plantation houses about Bayou Pierre saw their household effects being carried off bodily—caravans of mules laden down with the fleecy blankets and the snowy table damask and the rich brocatelle curtains that had made Mrs. Woodson's parlor the envy of her less fortunate neighbors; dumping carts groaning under piles of carpets and rich rugs, and bristling with chair legs and sofa legs; costly plate-glass mirrors flashing the sun rays into blinking eyes as their grinning appropriators passed defiantly by trundling them along the dusty road on wheelbarrows, in close proximity to the vases from the parlor mantels and the waffle-irons from the kitchen dresser—they called the Woodsons "fools," and, looking on in impotent

rage, resolved to cling to their own possessions with a deathless grip.

One night the sky grew lurid and the sound of fiercely-crackling, blazing timbers arrested every ear within reach of it. It was the Woodson house in flames. People said the freedmen, rioting in a lawless sense of liberty, which first presented itself in the guise of license, had set fire to it in the vain hope of finding the family silver, which must be hidden away somewhere in some of its many nooks and crannies. It existed in great quantities, and the old folks had not taken it away, so there it must be.

Those were lawless days. Might made right. The might lay in the Woodson quarters just then. The neighbors looked on at the burning in apathetic dismay; there was nothing to do or to say excepting to repeat that "old man Woodson had turned fool." Vulturine hordes hovered industriously about the heaps of ashes, which were all that was left of the handsome house on the Woodson place, raking, sweeping, sifting, poking, excavating for the melted mass of silver and gold that must lie somewhere in the ruins. Every man, woman and child that could find standing-room in the ashy arena was there, excepting old Merrick, the Woodson carriage-driver, who had nothing to do in those chaotic days.

He stood aloof with his withered hands folded over the handle of the long carriage-whip that he carried about with him mechanically, and fixed his glittering eyes on the eager silver-hunters with contemptuous scorn. Every now and then his tight-shut lips would

open sufficiently to emit a chuckle that had almost a ring of triumph in it; then they would close again viciously over the words "Car'an crows," which always preceded his sudden departure from the scene of activity.

People began to say that old Merrick was going crazy. He was seen so often prowling around a certain spot in the Woodson wild lands, just outside the plantation fence, with no earthly object in view, apparently. He was always muttering to himself. The keenest ear could not catch the words he muttered. He gave them a sort of rhythm that produced the effect of an incantation.

It was not until his course was fully run, and old Merrick, long after the war, was laid to rest under the black-thorn tree in the family burying-ground, that that muttered incantation became matter of history. What he said was meaningless by itself: "Two pan'l souf—turn t'odes syc'mo', two rails east—turn t'odes sweet gum—stop dar;" but through all his waking hours, making sure no ear was near enough to catch his incantation, old Merrick said the mystic words over and over to himself, sometimes adding, as an explanatory supplement: "Mout forgit, you know, den w'ite folks wouldn' trus' ol' Merrick no mo.'"

Ashes! That was what Gus Woodson came home to. The world seemed turned to ashes. The old homestead—ashes. The cause he had fought for—ashes. All the high bounding hopes of his early manhood—ashes. Even poor Sandy and the led horse had succumbed and were—ashes. He and Burgundy

alone came back up the long drive between the live-oak trees that looked so absurdly pointless now, leading up to nothing but a huge grass-grown shapeless heap, where the blackberry bushes had already taken root and had flung their sprays of white flowers tenderly about the ruins of a home. Only a little while he and Burgundy stood there motionless with down-dropped heads. Burgundy was tired. He was four years older than when he had last pranced down that long vista between the live-oak trees with the buoyant young cavalryman on his back. His rider was not tired, only sick—sick at heart and weary of life while he stood there indulging himself in this brief mute halt over the grave of his hopes. He, too, was four years older than when last he passed under the green canopy of the over-arching live-oaks that led from the house to the white gate at the end of the lawn, and centuries graver. There was none of the consternation of surprise in his steady downward gaze upon the grassy heap at his feet. It was an old story. There were thousands of just such shapeless, grass-grown, pathetic ruins all over the land he loved. He would build the big house again some of these days, and bring the old folks back from exile. But there was no place for them yet. He and Burgundy must rough it together for a little while longer. He raised his head to see what was left.

There was the two-room cabin back of the kitchen. Poor Sandy used to live in one of them. It was vacant now. There was more than room enough left for all his earthly possessions. He would have a shed knocked up against the gable end for Burgundy.

Perhaps Burgundy would have to be put in the plow now ; wasn't his own hand already upon it so firmly that there was to be no looking back ? There was no looking back.

Old Merrick came to him the first night he spent in his new home, in the cabin that had been Sandy's, and stood before him with a pickax and a spade : " I'se ready, son, if you is," was all he said, and the two went out together into the dark night, trudging through brier patches along the outer line of the tumble-down fence, until old Merrick called a halt. Gus Woodson was going for his own, but those were disorganized times. There were new and untried people in the old cabins. To-morrow he would start with his big box that held the family silver and the mother's diamonds for New Orleans, to convert them into the greenbacks that still held the charm of novelty for him. Old Merrick alone knew the secret of the hiding-place. It was he who had lashed his foaming horses back up the carriage-drive after depositing the old folks in exile, and gathered all the valuables into the big box he had first planted empty in the grave prepared for it ; then, laboring to and fro through the long dark night, he had not rested until the box-lid was securely screwed down over the silver and jewelry and the broken ground was sodded over and strewn with under-brush, " sorter keerless lak son." With what pride he told his story over to Gus as together they labored to bring the box to the surface by aid of its strong leather straps ! And what a proud glitter came into his dim eyes as the young man held out his strong sun-burned hand to clasp the withered horny one of the

faithful freedman who had made such royal use of his new-found privilege of independent action !

That was how Gus Woodson got his fresh start in life. There were detractors who laughed to scorn the idea of a boy "raised as Gus Woodson had been" supposing he could grapple with the problem of free labor in its infancy and "make it pay." They predicted that he would soon follow the example of his older brothers, who, rather than take the hateful oath of allegiance, had started for Honduras immediately on receiving their paroles. There were those who gave him three months in which to tire of eating off tin plates on a deal table with no table-cloth on it, and of making his own fire in the morning. "There never had been a Woodson yet who loved work, and there never would be." No, not that he loved work, but that he was newly enamored of independence, newly resolved not to be on the side of the defeated always.

It was up-hill work. He knew beforehand it would be. The tools with which he was going to rebuild his shattered fortunes were blunt and clumsy. The A B C of the freedman's education was distrust of his former owner. He called a convention of his constituents on the day when the contract was to be signed for making the first crop on the Woodson place since the war. He had chosen evening so that none of the new people should have an excuse for not hearing its conditions. The light from a single kerosene lamp fell on the long sheet of legal cap that had been carefully drawn up under the supervision of a lawyer for the mutual protection of lessee and lessor. It was a new way of dealing with "black folks," but old things had passed

away forever. The little sitting-room in the cabin was crowded to repletion with towering forms in rags and tatters, whose owners looked distrustfully down on the young but serious white face revealed to them by the meager light of the kerosene lamp. It was a solemn occasion. The written contract looked imposing. Not one of them could read. How were they to know what they were binding themselves to? They had the general understanding that they were going to "crap on sheers," but it didn't need all that paper and ink to tell them that. They were all there, stalwart men with the vacant faces of infancy; slatternly women making up in noisy demonstration what they lacked of feeling at ease; open-mouthed boys, with a certain alertness that came of only a limited experience of slavery; open-eyed girls who were passing through life in a state of bovine placidity.

Gus read his document slowly and impressively and conscientiously, never skipping one "party of the first part," nor slurring over a single "party of the second part." It was confusing. It was bewildering. It was incomprehensible. A dead silence followed the reading. He dipped his pen tentatively into the inkstand at his elbow, and extended it toward the oldest-looking man present. They were all strangers to him. Besides old Merrick, who stood behind his chair, an idle but interested spectator of a drama in which he had no rôle to play, these were new people, people who had taken possession of his cabins because the "land lay" to suit them and they had to work somewhere. No one offered to touch the pen. How did they know what electric current of diabolism might pass from the



tip of the finger which they were requested to place on the end of the pen-handle while the landowner made their mark for them with the nib of the pen, and consign them to the powers of darkness, soul and body? They had taken the first step toward wisdom, they "did n' trus' nobody." A single voice near the outer edge of the crowd finally broke the spell of inaction:

"Read dat 'bout de sheers 'gin, ef you please, boss."

Gus patiently found the place wherein it was set forth, with much legal verbosity, that the parties of the second part were to have one-third of all the cotton and the corn raised by them on the land belonging to the party of the first part; and read it again slowly and distinctly, then held his finger on the place while he sent his patient eyes in search of the seeker after light.

"Dat 'll do, boss, 'bleege t' you, dat's 'nough fur dis nigger. Any nigger dat's fool 'nough t' work fur one-fird de crap w'en he kin git one-fofe by jus' steppin' t' odder side Bayer Peere 'serves t' starve t' deff. Dem dat wants to cawnt rac' wid you is got my permit t' do so. Dis nigger's gwine whar he kin git his full jues."

In vain Gus endeavored to make him understand the superiority of his own proffered one-third over his neighbor's one-fourth. His fractions only drove them mad. His interlocutor stooped to recover the ragged felt hat he had dropped on the floor in the excitement of protest, and slapping it against his knee by way of restoring its pristine luster, put it on at a defiant angle and turned from the audience chamber. He wasn't going to be "juggled" out of his freedom of action by a volume of words that conveyed no idea to his

densely befogged brain, and that white man didn't live that could make him say three was bigger than four. His lead was followed by the crowd. If Jack Dabney saw cause for dissatisfaction, it must exist, for Jack was the acknowledged possessor of a "mouty levil headpiece"; and Gus's cabins were all empty again the next day.

Ah, yes, it was up-hill work! There was ignorance to combat, and helplessness to condone, and inefficiency to be borne with; there were the sly, cruel machinations of the office-seeking carpet-bagger to be met with patience and dignity; there were countless intrusive ghosts from out the dead past to be remanded determinedly to the realm of oblivion; there was the bitter consciousness that a cloud of witnesses were ready and alert to catch his slightest breath, his faintest whisper, even his irrepressible sighs for the past that had been so sweet and full, to fan them with the breath of malice into the quick consuming fires of sectional animosity.

But as the days of toil were succeeded by the long evenings of rest in the little cabin that had once been Sandy's, and he smoked his brier-wood pipe on the gallery, in the dark, with old Merrick crouching on the steps below him, maundering endlessly on about the old times that would never come again, his past resolved itself into a slowly moving panorama, and he saw it all for the first time from the outside.

It is not often that his gaze is cast backward. It is thrown ever forward toward that bright beacon-light of hope which only young eyes can see. He is laying the foundations of the old house again. Not

as they were. Nothing can ever be with him quite as it was. Only broader and deeper and surer, with higher springing arches and breezier outlook and a general betterment. And, as with the foundations of the old home, so with himself. Like some long hibernating animal, he has sloughed the garments of sloth and bestirred him to a new life of activity and endeavor. He is laying the foundations of his new life broader and deeper and surer, with higher springing aims and breezier outlooks. Who will not waft him a fraternal God-speed?

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A BONE OF CONTENTION.

IT is only once on record that all the ladies of the Blue Lick neighborhood were ever in perfect accord on any question, and that was before the building of the "Brick Church."

Strangers approaching Blue Lick from the east come unexpectedly upon a little Gothic affair sitting back from the road and clinging to a low wooded hill. Its red-brick surface "composes" well with the various shades of green that form a background to it in summer. Honeysuckles and bright coral cypress vines run riot over its exterior, swaying their perfumed censers through the open windows on the rare occasions of divine service, without aid of acolyte or direction of priest. As a feature of the landscape, the Brick Church has much to commend it. Architecturally, also, it is a decided success, though, perhaps, its spire is open to censure on the score of over-ornamentation, and suggests the harsh criticism that its architect might have started life as a confectioner's apprentice. It springs boldly heavenward at first, but, apparently impressed with the utter futility of trying to overtop the stately young pines that stand proudly erect all round about the little Brick Church, terminates abruptly

and looks not unlike a badly sharpened lead-pencil with a gall nut stuck on its point.

The pines rain their shining needles softly down to hide the barrenness of the ground it stands on. An acre of land has been inclosed in several successive rail fences and called by courtesy the church-yard. Rail fences are not permanent institutions in the neighborhood of Blue Lick, and the man who supplies the material for the church fences rejoices in the possession of a perennial job.

This inclosure was originally intended for a graveyard. The Blue Lick people used to express themselves regretfully at having no consecrated ground in which to bury their dead. But no spade has ever yet penetrated the brown carpet of the pine needles to break ground for a grave, and the probabilities are that no *Hamlet* of even a remote future will ever glean therein material for a homily. People still lay their loved and lost away under their own vines and rose-bushes, in nooks in their own flower-tangled gardens, where no controversial disputes can possibly disturb their slumbers, and where the difficulty of persuading a Presbyterian rose to shed its sweetness over a Methodist plot may not be encountered; nor need any immersionist be shocked by the presence of a meagerly sprinkled sleeper in Baptist possessions.

A stile crosses the worm fence in front of the church door, up to which it leads by way of a grass-grown walk. The stile is a permanent institution, but not unfrequently it stands alone, an inconsequent-looking thing, supporting the fiction of an inclosure without the indorsement of a single panel of fencing. When

things reach this pass, the people of Blue Lick say : " It is a shame. Somebody ought to wake the trustees up." So somebody does wake the trustees up, and a new fence is ordered. Some of these days they expect to have a settled minister, and then the weeds along the grass-grown walk will not flaunt it quite so insolently, and vagrant cows will not be at liberty to take their afternoon siestas on its shady side, and the gall nut on the apex of the spire will vibrate to the ringing of a big bell, and a millennial dawn will whiten the theological horizon of Blue Lick, and the little church will lose its lonely look.

Whether it will prove to be an Episcopal millennium, or a Baptist, or a Presbyterian one, who shall dare say. At present, while it is conceded that architecturally and æsthetically the Brick Church is satisfying, the question of its efficacy as an evangelizing agency is still an open one. Nevertheless, it is something to remember that once upon a time the ladies all acted in unison, and were agreed upon one point : Blue Lick must have a church.

It was Miss Margery Banks who first set this idea actively afloat. She was a very popular woman before that spasm of church-building energy seized upon her. She has not fingers enough on both hands, taking in thumbs and all, to count her enemies now. The Blue Lick boys call Miss Margery "a late bloomer," because, after leading the most secluded and innocuous girlhood, she suddenly effloresced into a determined and merciless woman with a mission, and that mission the building of a church for Blue Lick.

She planted the seed of this idea with brisk energy

in all sorts of soil. She careered wildly all over the country on her little sorrel mare. No vicissitudes of wind or weather damped her ardor. Men declared that it would be vain to flee even unto the mountains of Hepzidam to escape pursuit. It was fatal to encounter her on the road, at the store, or even in the sacred precincts of one's own home. She was sure to pelt you with one of four words, perhaps with all four at once. Subscription, donation, tableau, fair.

These were the four keys that were to open the gates of the spiritual world to benighted Blue Lick, and Miss Margery was going to fit them all with locks. The zeal of God's house bade fair to eat her up. That she should have sowed her seed, some on rocky, some on sandy, some on good soil was but to follow in the wake of every sower.

None of the men ventured to contradict her flatly when she declared that Blue Lick ought to have a church. Some said, "Of course it ought." Others said "They supposed so," and others, again, indulged in a tentative "Why."

Blue Lick wasn't much of a place, but it was the county seat, and it was the nucleus of a very wealthy agricultural district, and "it really was just little short of scandalous," the way they kept or didn't keep Sunday. Miss Margery's plea was always for the young people who were growing up, tacitly giving over the elders and her own contemporaries to the powers of darkness. She wanted the children that were "coming on" to have the benefit of a church. She began where every wise revolutionist begins, with the women.

There were the Spencers. The Spencers owned three plantations, a town-house in New Orleans, and a cottage for summer use at the Sweet Sulphur Springs in Virginia. People with three different homes really hadn't time to form local attachments, but Mrs. Spencer had growing sons, and Miss Margery approached her with the fearlessness born of confidence in herself and her cause. Mrs. Spencer agreed with her quickly. A church was a very desirable investment. It kept the young men from loafing on the store galleries, and really the Sundays were desperately stupid. One couldn't read and write letters all day long. A church would be an excellent reminder of the respect due the one day out of seven, especially if it (the church, not the day) had a bell. Of course she would do all she could to help on the good work.

There was the doctor's wife, who had been startled recently into a contemplative frame of mind on this very subject by having her eight-year-old boy mistake the picture of a church spire for a pigeon-house. The poor little heathen had never been inside a sacred edifice. The doctor's wife was one of those naturally devout creatures who would have tried to inoculate her boy with the Thirty-Nine Articles even if she had been turned adrift with him in scorching deserts, as was Hagar of old, handsomely equipped with a bottle of water and a loaf of bread. Miss Margery had no difficulty whatever in enlisting her sympathies, and in view of the receptive frame of mind she found her in, she hurled all four of her keys at the doctor's wife, leaving her pledged to a donation, a subscription, a



part in the tableau of "Blue-beard's Wives," and the furnishing of a fancy-table for the church fair.

Then there were the Carol girls. She found them a trifle mutinous at first. The Carol girls were advanced thinkers. They had been educated at the North, and considered themselves well in the van of all thought. The Blue Lick neighborhood did not give them a very satisfactory area for the display of the profundities, but it was their life-long home. They loved the old plantation home, and they had evolved a plan that had worked admirably so far for distinguishing Sunday from the other six days, and they doubted whether Miss Margery's contemplated innovation would result in improving the manners or the morals of the neighborhood. All the Carol instincts were conservative and aristocratic. A neighborhood church must of necessity be awfully democratic.

They listened to Miss Margery's glowing arguments with cool politeness. They preferred "the existing mode of divine worship." "The existing mode of divine worship" consisted of delightful little reunions in somebody's parlor every Sunday for the purpose of singing. The Carol girls would have preferred high-class oratorios and that sort of thing, but Moody and Sankey and the Bliss collection were better adapted to the vocal capacities of the neighborhood, and therefore received the preference, and were sung vigorously every Sunday morning to somebody's piano accompaniment.

The intervals between hymns were devoted to interchange of neighborhood items. Ill-natured gossip

was, of course, tacitly forbidden on these semi-sacred occasions, and if the men showed a tendency toward absorption in crop discussions, all that was necessary was to give out a fresh tune and start the piano. Every body was sure of being invited to go home to dinner by every body else. Altogether, Sunday was the most delightful day in the week. The Spencer boys had splendid voices and they rarely missed "Sankeying," as it was locally termed.

Miss Margery Banks was a born diplomat. She knew the Sankey Sundays were a great institution; no one had enjoyed them more than she, real intellectual treats; but she was thinking of the young people coming on. They might not all be vocally inclined. She had taken it for granted that the Spencer boys and the Carol girls would compose the choir of the church when it was built; there was no one else who could possibly fill the position at all. But it was scarcely worth while going on with the project if she had to leave the Carol girls out of her Beauty of the Harem, Cleopatra and Mark Antony, and Sleeping Beauty tableaux.

The Carol girls were not left out. They supposed Blue Lick ought to have a church. Yes, they would help with the tableaux.

There was the Judge's widow, whose boys declared they couldn't see the difference between their going out with their fishing-rods on Sunday and her sitting at home reading Shakespeare, or Washington Irving, or any thing that wasn't a sermon. And how could she show them any difference when there wasn't any church to go to? Of course, they must have a church.

Not that the people of Blue Lick were in any one particular more unregenerate than the most conservative descendant of the Pilgrim Fathers. They were simply, as Drummond would put it, "in correspondence with their environment," and Miss Margery's laudable desire was to make some improvement in the environment.

The women all enlisted, she turned her batteries on the men. They were almost bomb-proof. It was a spiritual palsy rather than active antagonism she had to combat. The people about Blue Lick were the victims of circumstances. Circumstances had placed miles of rough country roads between the different dwellings. Each plantation was a little principality in itself. And the dwellers thereon were of necessity so absolutely independent of their nearest neighbors in all that pertained to their welfare in this world that it was small wonder they were slow to perceive the necessity for co-operation touching the things that pertained to another world.

Such isolated lives foster strong individuality. The men scattered about on the big plantations about Blue Lick formed their own opinions about things material and spiritual, assisted or hindered, as the case might be, by such theorists as Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, *et als*. They thought out their political status with no narrow bias engendered by the "leaders" of a local newspaper. Blue Lick had no local newspaper. When business or social instincts brought them together, the staple topics of conversation were the crops or the state of the Liverpool market. They would have regarded

any discussion touching the future prospects of their own or their neighbors' souls as a "piece of deuced sanctimoniousness," and would have voted the fellow who raised the question a "muff." They held that there was a time and place for every thing ; but as to the correct time and place for polemical discussions they were a trifle befogged.

They received Miss Margery's first shot variously. What was the matter with Blue Lick ? Didn't they (its citizens) pay their debts and keep their word like gentlemen ? Did they need a preacher to tell them they mustn't lie or cheat ? What if they did rally on the store galleries for an hour's idle chat of Sundays ? It was a sort of harmless exchange. It preserved public spirit alive. It obviated the necessity for a paper. Notwithstanding all which, "the late bloomer" smiled invincibly, and threw her tendrils (so to speak) about them all, men, women, and children, converting the cold into lukewarm, and the lukewarm into warm, and the warm into fervid, until the whole neighborhood was resolved into committees for this, that, and the other thing, and the sluggish tenor of its way was diverted into a swift-rushing torrent of energy, all tending towards one goal—the Blue Lick Church.

Dutton, who keeps the biggest store in Blue Lick, and who can see the Brick Church from his store gallery, says that the church had a "long sight better drawing capacity while it was going up than it has ever had since." Yes, every body watched it going up after the plans were finally decided on. Mrs. Spencer would drive in in her carriage to see how it was getting on. The different men, who had

after all given liberally of their substance under the force of public pressure, felt a proprietary interest in it. All the idlers about town found it an agreeable variation from whittling Dutton's gallery chairs to watch the joists and rafters of the new church put into place. The boys reveled in the delightful excitement of getting into every body's way, and the Doctor's wife anxiously watched the progress of the building that was to remove the stigma of profound ignorance from her benighted child, while Miss Margery beamed patronizingly on them all, from the rich man who had given the ground down to the poor one who mixed the lime and sand into a loblolly, with an admiring fringe of villagers standing close around the edge of his mortar-box.

And so the Blue Lick Church was built. It could not very well help being built, you know, seeing the entire community had a hand in it. Then the trustees were appointed—three men of unexceptionable records—men of worth and probity. Miss Margery said privately it was a pity they couldn't have "professors" for trustees, but she "supposed they would have to wait for some of the young ones that were coming on."

No, the trustees were not professors. But they were honest beyond question and they were the best to be procured under the circumstances. And the church had a bell. You don't see it under the knobby spire, because it never got any further than Dutton's store. Mrs. Spencer carpeted it—the building—out and out. The Carol girls gave a reed organ, and there wasn't a thing lacking to the little red church on the green hill-side excepting a preacher.

Of course, the getting of a preacher devolved on the trustees, the best men in the world, but absolutely devoid of any "leanings." There was Major Spencer, one of the most high-toned gentlemen in the world—a moral man, too, who always timed his visits to New Orleans when the Metairie course was in full blast. There was the Doctor, in whose eyes the preservation of people's bodies was of such stupendous moment that he really never had found time to formulate a creed for himself or adopt a ready-made one. And Dutton. The selection of Dutton, the biggest store-keeper in Blue Lick, for the third trustee was regarded by Dutton himself as the best joke of the season, but the ladies who had the selection of the trustees meant it as a concession to the democratic element that had put its shoulder to the wheel when they were building the church. They supposed they really ought not to be exclusive in church matters.

When it was impressed upon the three trustees that the church was waiting for a preacher, each one of them did what every wise man does in the hour of his perplexity, went home and consulted his wife.

"What denomination must he be?" Mrs. Spencer echoed, making exclamation points of her arched eyebrows at the Major's absurd question. "Now, Major Spencer, you don't suppose I would help to build any church in the world but a Presbyterian church. Why, I've been in correspondence with young Jeffreys, you know, he's in attendance on General Assembly, ever since the first brick was laid in that church. All you have to do is to invite him here on a visit, and when the time comes he will

occupy that pulpit. 'What will the Episcopalians who put their money in do?' That question I can't answer. But that is a Presbyterian church, Major Spencer, and I hope you will do your duty as a trustee without flinching."

The Major did flinch, but he also invited Mr. Jeffreys to come to Blue Lick on a visit.

The Doctor's wife was in a state of feverish over-readiness. The Bishop had written her word that in his diocesan rounds he would take in Blue Lick very shortly. He commended the energy displayed by the "faithful daughters of his diocese," and promised to bring with him a most excellent young man who had been acting as his chaplain, but whom he especially desired to see located in a neighborhood whose wealth and refinement would be a guarantee of appreciation. The Doctor's wife was quite used to shouldering the Doctor's responsibilities apart from his drugs and pill-boxes, and was justifiably elated to think how smoothly she was steering matters without the slightest friction for that "dear, good, busy man."

"But suppose the Methodists and Presbyterians don't want the Bishop and his chaplain?" the trustee's conscience pricked him into asking.

"Don't want the Bishop! Why, Dr. Marvin, don't you know that it is an Episcopal church? Do you suppose I would ever have done a hand's turn toward building any but an Episcopal church? Now, don't worry. All you've got to do is to notify the other trustees of the date of the diocesan visit. The Bishop will do the rest when he gets here."

The Doctor was new to the duties of trusteeship.

He was more than willing to leave this complex matter in the hands of his wife and the Bishop, with whom he had been in active correspondence for weeks. So he went back to his patients with a sense of relief and forgot all about notifying his confrères of the Bishop's diocesan visit.

The Dutton faction was for arranging matters on the majority plan. The "folks" that lived on the plantations and shipped their cotton by the hundred bales were not the ones who had to stick to one spot all the year round. It was Dutton's wife and Mrs. Rogers that "took the lawyers in" (in more senses than one) during court term, and the Sheriff's wife and the Recorder's family, and that set, who would fill the pews in the Brick Church when the Spencers and the Carols and that set were away in "the city." And for every-day wear give them a good strong shouting Methodist—a man that would stir the blood in your veins and make you feel, every time he got up to preach a sermon, that all the bother they'd had about building that church didn't count for nothing. Mrs. Dutton knew the very man. And he was her own mother's cousin. Had been "on the circuit" for twenty years. She was expecting him every day to visit mother. He generally did come when the broilers were of a good size, and he'd be on hand when he was wanted.

Yes, he was on hand when he was wanted. So was Mr. Jeffreys, the young man who had been in attendance on General Assembly, but they reached Blue Lick an hour or two after the Bishop. The Bishop talked as one having authority. His presence was



majestic, his robes were imposing. Besides he was two to one. He was re-enforced by a chaplain. On the day that he consecrated the new church Mrs. Spencer's young minister preached in the Court-house, and the benches in front of him were occupied by all the good Presbyterians in town, while Mrs. Dutton's mother's cousin held forth to a goodly constituency in the warehouse behind Dutton's store, that had been hastily swept and garnished for the purpose.

The Bishop left the chaplain behind him, but it did not take long for him to find out that the Episcopalian contingency was too small to support a minister alone, on making which discovery he shook the dust of Blue Lick from his highly polished shoes and followed the Bishop.

His successors, respectively a Presbyterian and a Methodist, were not long in coming to the same conclusion. It is one of these snarls that time does little towards straightening out, and that is the reason why the grass grows over the walk in front of the little Brick Church, and the cows take their afternoon siestas on its shady side, and the bell does not ring in a harmonious flock of worshipers to sit at the feet of an established minister.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### "OLD HARVEY."

HE is "old Harvey" now to all the men and boys of his locality, "irrespective of age, color, or previous condition." Some of the colored people who were young slaves when he was sheriff of the county before the war, and upon whose minds the awe-inspiring dignity of that office made such an indelible impression that no one who has once held it can ever again be quite like other folks, still doff their hats deferentially to "Boss Harvey," while the women of the county invariably speak of him as "poor old Mr. Harvey"; but this last is prolix and manifestly inconvenient for colloquial purposes, so that when strangers, taking immediate note of one of the most striking objects in the town, make inquiry concerning it, they are informed concisely that, "that's old Harvey." But as every body likes him—the older people because they remember what he was and what he has been to the neighborhood, and the younger people because they have been reared with a sort of traditional regard for old Harvey—the term comes from the most careless lips divested of all harshness or contempt, with rather a caressing sound, in point of fact.

He antedates almost all the institutions of the town,

for many of which he is largely responsible. He antedates that exceedingly irrelevant-looking new cupola on the old Court-house, which so painfully suggests a shabbily-dressed woman tricked out in a smart new bonnet that only emphasizes her dinginess. He antedates all the trees in the Court-house Square. Those trees, principally broad-branching live-oaks and conically aspiring cottonwoods, which accommodate each other kindly, are majestic in size now, and liberal in the matter of shade for teams and the buggies and the riding-horses and the ox-wagons that accumulate in Court-house Square on the "packet day," but old Harvey remembers when they were all feeble, struggling saplings, watched over by his official eye.

He selected them every one himself, riding over the woods, back of town, day after day, to consider the respective merits of the different sorts of shade-trees, and then going with the men he had employed for the more arduous undertaking of transplanting them. And when they actually began to grow, in spite of manifold prophecies to the contrary, and to checker the hoof-beaten ground of the square, with a network of small leaf-shadows, and spread a soft green veil before the weather-beaten face of the old Court-house, the sheriff thriftily built boxes promptly all about them to protect them against equine voracity, and notched the tops of the boxes ornamentally and had them all whitewashed. All of which gave the square such an exceedingly smart look that some of the citizens advocated a public vote of thanks to Mr. Harvey, their "efficient and public-spirited sheriff,"

He antedates the only church in the place, that pretty little Gothic concern that was secured to the town in such a tumultuous fashion, mainly through the efforts of the young women who doted on church-fairs and raffles. In fact, he remembers when there was nothing to the town but Davenport's store and the tavern where most of the lawyers "put up" when court is in session, the blacksmith's shop under the walnut trees above Davenport's, and the court-house itself.

The keenest regret of old Harvey's life is, that when the war broke out he in his official capacity ordered the removal of the county records to a place of safety. In consequence of this removal, they were lost entirely, and with his tender conscience he is always fancying that this one or that one of his old constituents has suffered irreparable loss through his mistaken zeal. But he had only meant to guard against the possibility of their falling into the hands of the Marine Brigade.

The Marine Brigade was a fleet of eight or nine vessels that infested the Mississippi River during the war in a sort of maritime guerrilla capacity. The soldiers of the brigade wore the uniform of the Federal Army, and the flag of the loyal floated from the mast-head of each of the eight boats. It was a power in its day. It was about the time when the Marine Brigade developed such an abnormal conscience in the interests of Uncle Sam as to carry off all Mrs. Judge Baker's silver in a sheet, that Mr. Harvey thought the county records might next fall victims to this unique rapacity, so had them removed.

Having been the innocent cause of such an

irreparable loss to the community, old Harvey has held himself ever since in conscience bound to make it good in every possible way, and the community can furnish no greater tribute of its confidence in his probity than its willingness to substitute his memory for the written records wherever practicable. People say that it was only after the loss of the county records that old Harvey began to show his age at all. He has not reached such an age yet that they are afraid to trust to his memory, and the announcement that old Harvey's deposition is to be taken is sufficient to crowd the Court-house with an audience that fills the young minister of the new Gothic church with bilious discontent. His own Sunday audiences never equal old Harvey's week day ones.

By tacit consent, the corner of the bench on Davenport's gallery, where the short winter sunshine comes the earliest and lingers the longest, is respected as old Harvey's seat. One must be very new to the ways of the town, or phenomenally indifferent to old Harvey's comfort, to appropriate it. There is no peradventure about his coming to occupy it. He comes up in the morning to read the New Orleans papers on the gallery. He is very methodical in his habits. As soon as he has had his breakfast—it is one of the local mysteries how old Harvey always makes sure of this desirable beginning to his day—he starts for Davenport's, and walks deliberately to the back of the store, where there is a barrel turned down upon its side. There is a faucet in the barrel, and there are tumblers on a shelf over it. Old Harvey asks nothing better of Fate than that Davenport's barrel of "Old Bourbon "

shall repeat the miracle of the widow's cruse. He has the freedom of the barrel. But he does not abuse it. He does not need to subscribe for any of the city papers, for he also has the freedom of the post-office. He is at liberty to slip the covers from any body's papers or magazines, with the single proviso that he puts them back in time for the mail-carriers sent in by their respective owners from the different plantations. Sometimes, not often, however, he makes mistakes, and slips things back into the wrong covers which is apt to result in his getting a mild back-biting, as when he mailed the New York *Clipper*, instead of the *Christian at Work*, to the young minister, and accidentally sent the pamphlet called "How to be beautiful" to Miss Varina Dawson. Miss Varina has never spoken to him since, but, so far as is known, she is the only enemy he has in the world. He tried to explain matters to her, but only made the snarl worse, and gave it up finally.

Old Harvey has a good deal of time on his hands that he finds it a trifle hard to dispose of. He kills a portion of it wandering about town, somewhat as a ghost might revisit the scene of his former usefulness or happiness. His office became a sinecure during the war, and when it ended—well, the carpet-baggers had the giving of all the offices in the county then, and old Harvey was not eligible—would not take the iron-clad oath. His successor in office, his married sister's old carriage-driver, Walsh, often comes to him for instruction and advice, and he always gives it kindly and conscientiously. No one ever saw any bitterness in his way of dealing with the new order. If it existed

in his heart, old Harvey was wise enough to suppress all outward show of it. His wanderings about town are entirely unofficial, but they have been the means of bringing several cases of genuine destitution to the ears of those who are able to afford relief. In by-gone times old Harvey had a remarkable scent for distress of any kind, and the people who marvel now that he should never have saved up from his big salary for the very rainy day that has overtaken him, will never know how prompt he used to be in succoring the needy.

Any one happening into Davenport's gallery about the middle of a hot afternoon is likely to see an old gentleman, with his chair tilted back against the weather-boarded sides of the store, his feet (encased in buttoned shoes which generally have several buttons missing) drawn up on the bottom round of the chair, his head reclining peacefully against the hard boards, a handkerchief spread over it and his face to protect him from the flies. From under this handkerchief issue a succession of well-modulated snores. The natives respect old Harvey asleep as well as awake, and pass by him into the store with clumsy efforts at quietness. He says there isn't another spot in town where he can sleep as well as in that hide-bottomed chair on Davenport's gallery. The river breezes blow on him there, and the old man seems to like to be "where something is going on."

His face, when he is awake, shows the very mildest type of physiognomy. His eyes are soft and brown, and almost wistful in their tender outlook. His hair, which is unusually thick for a man of his age, is long and white, and curls at the ends in a big wave. He

wears it combed straight back, and is perpetually putting it behind his large ears with an impatient gesture. He has a sensitive mouth that goes incongruously enough with his square under-jaw. He is just such a looking man as you would select from a crowd of men for a preacher with a devoted following of women.

Perhaps there are not more than half a dozen people in the neighborhood who can remember how Joel Harvey looked and acted when he was first made sheriff of the county. Mrs. Judge Baker is one of the few, and she still contends that the handsomest sight she ever saw was Harvey, mounted on his big black horse, Beelzebub, who always looked as if he was snorting fire and brimstone from his blazing eyes and wide-stretched nostrils. "He had a good deal of the devil in him." Mrs. Baker never located her pronouns with sufficient accuracy for one to decide whether it was Joel Harvey or his big black horse who had that Satanic infusion in his blood.

The duties performed in old Harvey's young and active years sometimes amounted to exploits, and are frequently recalled by his friends even at this late day for the edification of new-comers who may be inclined to regard the old man as an ordinary specimen of senility and a cumberer of the earth. Before the war his duties were the clearly defined ones appertaining to his office in all climes and ages, perhaps with such slight modifications or variations as local circumstances demanded. That dog business perhaps was one of these variations. Old Harvey tells that story himself. He never tells a story that redounds in the least to his own credit. But in the matter of the dogs he cut such

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a purely ridiculous figure that he recalls it now as one of his most delightful reminiscences.

"You see," he would say, pushing his long white hair behind his big ears with such a vindictive gesture that one marveled he did not pluck it out and cast it from him by way of permanent riddance, "things had come to such a pass in this county that there was not any use trying to raise sheep, unless you were philanthropically minded to feed your neighbors' dogs on Southdown mutton. The county was just clean plum run away with dogs. Every white fellow had his pack of deerhounds and his duck dog and bird dog, and every nigger had his pack of yelpin' yellow or brindle curs that wasn't worth the powder it 'd take to kill 'em. A little more and it would have taken the whole corn crop to make corn bread for 'em all. Well, the police jury put their heads together to see what could be done for the protection of the sheep-raising interests, and it resulted in high license. The dog license was put up so high that it would take a hundred-dollar-setter or pointer to be able to read its title clear, and life was rendered practically valueless to the rest of our dog citizens.

"Of course it fell to me to see the law put into execution. This county was either bound to make her dogs a source of revenue or else get shet of 'em. It was taken for granted a man would only hold on to them that was worth paying a big license for, and that sort ain't the sheep-killer. Well, may be I didn't have a tough job ! I sent my deputies out in every direction, and they reported a regular dog massacre following in their wake. They woke up one tolerably obstinate old

'coon, however, and I found it necessary to visit him in person. He was waitin' for me. It was old Lige Blackman, back yonder in the cypress swamp. He called out to me to get down and 'light, as soon as I pulled Beelzebub up at his gate, but I didn't have much time for fooling with him, so I told him in as few words as possible what I'd come for. I'd never seen Lige so polite and accommodating. He stood on his gallery rubbing his hands one over the other sorter gleeful like, and I sat on Beelzebub's back, while we talked across his front fence.

"Presently he grinned all over his wrinkled face. 'As I understand it, you want my dogs or my money, do you, Mr. Harvey?' he asked as mealy-mouthed as you please. 'Yes, sir,' I said; but before the words were well out of my mouth he took down a horn that was hanging on a nail against the side of the house and blew a blast that would have made Roderick Dhu howl with envy. And then they came charging around the house corners, loping through the hall, squeezing through the lattice-work under the house, prancing, yelping, barking, jumping, howling, a whole pack of devils, big dogs and little dogs, bloodhounds leashed together with murder in their hearts and in their great red eyeballs and loling tongues, deer dogs that had got the worst of the fray in a fight, limping along on a broken leg, bulldogs with their ears chewed off, yellow curs with no ears at all and no tails to speak of.

"Of all the infernal din ever heard outside of Bedlam, those dogs made it, but above it all I could hear old man Lige's bland voice: 'Take 'em, Mr.

Harvey, take 'em every one. They're entirely at your disposal. I'm a law abiding citizen, Mr. Harvey.'

"Beelzebub didn't take in the situation at all, and when the whole pack of 'em, twenty, sir, came flying at him over the fence and under the gate and through the pickets, he first of all let fly at 'em with his heels, but all of sudden seemed to conclude they were too many for him, and getting the bit between his teeth wheeled and started back for town like a shot. I couldn't do a thing with him. And we came with a retinue, too, I can tell you. Old Lige always swore he didn't sick 'em on after Beelzebub turned tail; that he was just laughing a little in his sleeve. I don't know how that may be, but I know I left for town with twenty dogs at my heels. They dropped back one after the other, all but the bloodhounds: but when I pulled Beelzebub up at Davenport's finally, I had to acknowledge that old Lige had come out ahead."

Old Harvey will tell stories of that kind on himself, but he never reminds any one of the countless services he rendered to the county or to individual citizens in the days of his power and prosperity. But there are many such stories extant. When the war came and the whole social system was shaken to its center, Joel Harvey was put at the head of a vigilance committee. People said he would know best how to act and there would never be any danger of his judgment being swept away by passion. No higher trust has ever been reposed in him than the men of his neighborhood reposed when they went away to the army

saying : "Look after my people, Joel." He was one of the men who showed their heroism by not going to the army, though he had no such cruel ordeal to go through with as Davenport had. He was an acknowledged authority, so far as any authority was acknowledged, and he and Beelzebub were to be seen at any hour of the day, or the night either, if there was a whisper of danger or disorder on any of the plantations within his reach.

It was while he was Regulator that Joel Harvey made what he calls his "narrow escape." It was an escape from matrimony. He has encountered almost every sort of peril at one and another time of his life, but he still declares that the Widow Mason came nearer vanquishing him completely than any thing else of earthly mold ever has.

Although the office of Sheriff was virtually extinct for the time being, he still occupied the room in the ground floor of the Court-house on whose door in gold letters on a panel of black tin were the imposing words, "Sheriff's Office." The court-room proper was immediately over his head, but he seldom penetrated there now. • It had fallen into the hands of the Ladies' Sewing Society, which had taken out a contract, seemingly, to clothe the entire Confederate Army with jackets and trowsers and shirts made out of all sorts of material, from brocatelle window-curtains down to bed-ticking, and with a violent departure from all the established canons of tailoring. Box after box of these hastily and patriotically constructed garments Sheriff Harvey had been called upon to ship for them. Shipping a thing in those days was fraught with difficulties

and uncertainties that border on the incomprehensible in these days. So; whenever the sheriff was requested to come up-stairs to where all the matrons and maidens of the town were sewing, and snipping, and folding, and packing, it was a foregone conclusion that there was another box for him to ship to the victims of all this unskilled labor.

The Widow Mason was up there on one of these occasions, not sewing, nor cutting, nor folding, nor packing, simply crying quietly in one corner and pouring her woes out into the ears of the only woman who seemed to have time to listen to her. This was Mrs. Judge Baker, but she too turned a deaf ear on the little woman when Sheriff Harvey's head loomed above the chattering crowd and hurried forward to give him minute directions about the shipping of the box to the Redfield Rifles in Richmond. Mrs. Baker was the President of the Society.

"Poor child," she said, nodding her head backwards toward the Widow Mason, "she's in a pucker. So afraid the cotton-burners will find her cotton that's hidden out in the woods. She says she made Dempsey, her driver, mad this morning; refused to let him have coffee three times a day, I believe, and he helped hide the cotton, and she is sure he will tell. He's already threatened to show it to them the next time they visit the neighborhood."

Joel Harvey made no comment, but that night a skiff shot across the river at a point considered quite safe from molestation from the gunboat, and lying in the bottom of it was a man with his hands tied behind him and a bandage over his eyes. He

was untied and turned loose in the woods on the opposite side and advised to go to Vicksburg without delay. The next day Joel drove out to the Widow Mason's, sitting on the front of a wagon. There were two men with him. They had come to move the Widow Mason's cotton to another spot in the dense forest that surrounded her place, so that in case Dempsey concluded to return instead of going to Vicksburg, as he had been advised, his information to the cotton-burners would be worthless.

The Widow Mason would have gladly rewarded the handsome sheriff for his zeal in her behalf by marrying him. Widows have a way of making their intentions palpable without detracting from their fascinations. Old Harvey is of the opinion to this day that if the Marine Brigade had not raided the town just about that time and carried him off a prisoner, Mrs. Mason would have been Mrs. Harvey, and he would have been nobody.

He considers that the brigade was an instrument in the hands of Providence for that occasion only. They really did not want him, but to quote old Harvey himself once more, "they had gotten so used to picking up valuables wherever they landed, that, having exhausted the other movables, they took him, meaning to return and get the Court-house next time." But having taken him, and really not knowing what to do with him, they forwarded him from hand to hand until he found himself at Alton Prison. There were a lot of fellows there that he knew, men who had been captured as scouts on the battlefield, men who had been picked up by the way-

side sick and worn. They were hungry and gaunt, and woe-worn and heart-sick. Harvey says he hung his head before them for very shame, because he was neither hungry, nor gaunt, nor heart-sick, nor woe-worn. But he did the only thing he could do for them, sold his gold watch, and added materially to their comfort.

He has never suffered much from that mysterious malady called heart-sickness. Old Harvey has always been an optimist. When the war first broke out, although he was not an original secessionist, he held himself in readiness to do whatever should be assigned him to do. He was quite sure it was all for the best. The conflict was irrepressible, and he rather rejoiced to think it would be over and done with during the years when he could lend most practical service.

He was a fatalist in his way, and the fatalist has an inward source of serenity that stands him in good stead in disjointed times. When Vicksburg fell, of course Harvey was not glad of it ; but it was really merely a question of time when it must surrender, and just think of the numberless precious lives saved by the cessation of hostilities. When women complained in his presence (and there were so few available men to whom they could complain in those days, that the Regulator had to hear a good many wails) of the numberless hardships the war had entailed, he aroused them to a very ambitious pitch by his absolute rejoicing over the fact that now the resources of the South must be developed, and this war was going to prove in the long end a great blessing to them all. It made not the least difference that the majority of his

cheerful prophecies came to naught. They had a good effect for the time, and Mrs. Judge Baker declares if it had not been for Harvey's remaining at home during the war, the women would all either have gone mad or died of the blues. Old Harvey can never be brought to see himself in the light of a benefactor, past or present. He considers his war record something to be very much ashamed of, and says his special reason for rejoicing in his old bachelorhood is because he will never be called on to define his position during that great crisis to any child of his for his own confusion.

Some few of the men, but none of the women, in the county know what is old Harvey's especial claim to the almost reverential consideration shown him by the older men. When he was Regulator he had a way of finding out things that passed ordinary penetration. It was at the time when the fewest number of white men were left in the county, and the greatest degree of dissatisfaction was rife among the bewildered creatures who had been thrown upon their own resources with a frightful suddenness, that dark whispers of diabolical plans for securing to themselves the homes and possessions of the men who were absent fighting to retain them in slavery, came to the Regulator's ears.

One by one the ringleaders of the plot disappeared with a suddenness and a completeness that filled the minds of their followers with superstitious terror. The most perfect good feeling was soon restored between the races, and the whispers died away. When somebody asked him confidentially after the war (for this episode still remains something



of a secret) how he managed about "them" while he was a prisoner, he told how Wailes helped him.

Wailes is as black as ebony. The sheriff bought him, a runaway, from a harsh master, and made him his own body-servant. Wailes alone knew of the subterranean prison under the Court-house, where the three ringleaders against the peace of the county were incarcerated during one year of the war. It was to him the sheriff relinquished the key, and upon him devolved the care of them when the brigade carried Harvey off. "I knew I could trust Wailes," he always says, but he does not like much to talk about it. Wailes is his devoted slave to this day, and he and old Harvey alone know that the sleek-looking porter in Davenport's store is one of his incarcerated conspirators, the jolly, well-paid engineer in the Widow Mason's gin-house another, and the janitor of the new law offices, of which the town is so justly proud, a third. Old Harvey has been mainly instrumental in securing them these positions, and they all three adore him.

No, old Harvey has nothing especial to be proud of. He is very poor now. He is too old to hold office, even if he could be elected to it, and he has led the veriest grasshopper's life, so far as looking out for number one goes; but he does not seem to be much more concerned about number one now than he did in the days when he and Beelzebub regulated the county, nor will he ever be. Grasshoppers will be grasshoppers.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### TONY'S WHITE ANGEL.

PERHAPS if Tony had been given any choice in the matter, he would not have chosen to be born free, at a time when the pains and penalties attaching to that condition so far outweighed its factitious advantages. "Freedom" is a word of a fine resonant sound, but as Tony was born minus those innate cravings for liberty that we read so much about, his personal experience has inclined him to underrate rather than to overrate that abstract good. Lindy and he are much given to drawing unfavorable comparisons between their own estate and that of the colored folks who inherited owners.

Were much given, rather, for since the Emancipation Proclamation has deprived the objects of their envy of their superior rights and privileges, and they find the boat they are in crowded with those who have to shift for themselves, just as Tony and Lindy have been doing always, they hold their heads more erect and have lost something of that apologetic aspect which made them seem always to be deprecating existence.

Lindy is Tony's wife, and has periodically added to his sense of the burdensome by increasing his cares

as a family man until his quiver is o'er full. Which is another boon he does not seem at all grateful for. Lindy has social aspirations which Tony and circumstances together combined to repress on all occasions. She expends a good deal of time and ingenuity inventing excuses for expeditions "up to the Co'nel's." Now it is a bucket of soft-soap that she wants to trade off for flour or "'lasses," again, an exchange of watermelon seeds, of which fruit she claims the very best variety. But the soft-soap trade and the exchange of watermelon seeds are but subterfuges behind which lurks her "hanker" for a talk with Aunt Betsy about the coming "distracted meetin'," or something of the sort.

Aunt Betsy is the cook at the Colonel's and all the essences of all the good dinners she has ever cooked seem to have been absorbed into her ample personality, making of her, by some process of alchemy unknown to science, the very round and jolly and comfortable mortal she is. She treats Tony's "folks," whenever accident brings them into her presence, with a sort of condescension that goes well with her towering turban and imposing figure. Her sympathy not infrequently finds substantial expression in "broken vittles" and in tin cans full of coffee grounds that she has saved up for them. So, when Tony fishes out of the tin pail, where Lindy has put his dinner to keep it from the children and the flies, a wing of turkey or a section of cold mince pie that certainly never originated in his own larder, he knows that his wife has been up to the Colonel's.

It never occurs to either of them to resent

patronage from such a source as Aunt Betsy. The advantages of life are so manifestly on the side of the Colonel's cook that the palm of personal superiority is meekly accorded her, and Lindy holds herself in readiness to accommodate her potent friend to any extent. She frequently sends little propitiatory, or rather votive, offerings, up to the cabin in the Colonel's quarters, where Aunt Betsy reigns unofficially after dark; such as a braided mat, for which she has been saving rags for years, or a lot of the balsam apples she raises so successfully.

Personally Tony is not a striking figure. He is long and lank and loose jointed. He is narrow-chested and has burning black eyes set far back in cavernous sockets. He is a "griff," which means that he is neither black nor white nor brown. He suggests the idea of having been spoiled in the bleaching. Perhaps this is partially due to lack of nourishment, for Tony and his folks do not live on the fat of the land. The little darkies call him the "Kunger man," and stand in unnecessary awe of him. This is due undoubtedly to the fact that the mystery enveloping Tony's birth has never been solved, and the present generation has absorbed among its traditions the queer stories that got afloat about him long before they saw the light.

It was generally understood that he was the son of crazy Margaret, who used to wander about the country bareheaded and barefooted, alike oblivious to heat or cold, rain or drought, until her hair was burned red by exposure and her skin was like tanned leather. Crazy Margaret would come to the cabin windows or doors whenever the pangs of hunger made her seek the

face of man, and looked wistfully in, like a starved dog. She was an object of superstitious terror to all the negroes in the country. Packages of food and articles of clothing were placed on shelves outside of cabins for her convenience, and that conscience must be seared indeed that would permit any tampering with the supplies meant for crazy Margaret. She was found dead one day in the lint room of the Sellers' gin, and sitting by her side on the floor, crying from fright or from hunger, was a three-year-old boy. That was the first any body ever knew about Tony.

The manner of his introduction was uncanny, and the effect of it upon the people of his own color was characteristic. He had come to them as a sort of undesirable legacy from crazy Margaret, and Death was her executor. They were afraid not to keep life in the small, pinched body of the child, for fear of vengeance overtaking them through the medium of her disembodied spirit. Tony, entirely unconscious of his own power, had but to raise those solemn eyes of his to the face of man, woman, or child to insure immediate attention to his bodily needs.

The tenacity of the vital spark in bodies for which no one cares is a phenomenon of frequent observation. Tony throve like a stray cur upon the bones and crusts flung at him by indifferent hands. When he got big enough to pick cotton he was promoted from the ranks of the stray curs to that of the beasts of burden, and old clothes were added to the crusts which had previously constituted his chief emolument. No one ever had occasion to imagine that Tony wasted speculation on

the hardships or the peculiarities of his own condition, but he was of a silent turn, and before he was well out of his 'teens the colored people had settled in their own minds that he was in close communion with Old Nick, whenever one of his dumb spells came over him.

Some Texas travelers camped out in the woods near town one night, when Tony was about eighteen years old, and he was sent out to the camp by the woman who had a one year's lease of him, with butter-milk to sell. That was the last that was seen of him for three years. One day the husband of Tony's defrauded lessee went to town with a load of cotton, and brought back the astonishing information that Tony was living in town and that he had a wife! His story was received with scoffing incredulity until corroborated by more than half-a-dozen witnesses. One of these testified that crazy Margaret's boy was living in the old cow-shed on the Myers' place, and worked the Myers' garden for house rent. Another, that his wife was a peaked-lookin' critter that went out scrubbin' w'en any body wanted scrubbin', en' staid at home to help Tony in the Myers' garden when they didn't. Another, that Tony had become a "brag" fiddler and was "givin' it out" that if the folks wanted him to fiddle for 'em of Saturday nights, he would do it for four bits a night.

Curiosity was rife for a little while as to how Tony and his wife were going to keep soul and body together, but he was a man now, and the owner of a wife and a fiddle. Such an equipment ought to be sufficient to launch any man successfully upon life's troubled waters, so, considering their obligations to

the spirit of crazy Margaret canceled by his voluntary departure from among them, they washed their hands of him.

The home in which Tony and Lindy began life was not an abode of luxury. Once upon a time Judge Myers, in a moment of bucolic indiscretion, had determined "to keep Alderneys," and having imported a fine young heifer, with mild, shy eyes, he luxuriated in imagination, for a brief while, in such cream as had never before blessed the local palate. No one ever thought of such a thing as sheltering cows in that mild climate, but an Alderney was a different thing, and the Judge built a house for the distinguished foreigner and cooped her up in it, very much as he would have cooped a mammoth canary, rendering life such a burden to the poor thing that she contrived to hang herself with her halter. After that the cow-house was tenantless until Tony applied for it, promising to keep the Judge's garden in order by way of rent.

The Judge's garden was kept in passable order, but Lindy's turbaned head was seen stooping over the growing lettuce or pease more often than Tony's. Tony's fiddle seemed to get in the way of his usefulness. And not infrequently the plaintive melodies to which he gave preference when playing for his own solace, floated out upon the air at the hours of the day when most men are presumed to be absorbed in the arduous duty of bread-winning. Tony's habit was to lounge into town of early mornings and place himself where any one in need of a whitewasher might possibly see him and engage him. Or, if he

saw a load of wood freshly dumped down before a door, he would make application for the privilege of cutting it into handy shape and flinging it into the back yard. Or, if it was midsummer, and the cisterns were all giving out, he could earn a few dimes by begging an empty pork barrel, knocking a rough sled together, borrowing a mule, and hauling water from the Long Pond to the different households. It was a sort of a hand-to-mouth existence, and the hand frequently went to the mouth with very slender offerings ; but what could a "free nigger" do? Even the town people owned their own servants, and Tony and Lindy were forlorn outsiders.

Lindy made some pathetic efforts at first to beautify the cow-house, but that was before the pickaninies began to come so rapidly. She and Tony knocked up some dry-goods boxes and empty barrels, and made what they called "furntcher," and she planted some prince's feather and zinnias on either side of the door, but the pigs of the neighborhood, mindful of the reckless quantity of corn that used to be fed to that ill-fated Alderney, had grown attached to the spot, and persisted in rooting them up, until Lindy's æsthetic yearnings were completely crushed.

Sometimes the people at the tavern would get behindhand when court was in session, and send for her to do chores or help in the kitchen. Those were Tony's white days. He knew she would come back with ample provision for a superior supper, and he could fiddle all day, sitting out under the sweet-gum tree at the back of the cow-house, without any of



those sharp reprimands for his "triflingness" which Lindy flung at him in moments of exasperation.

Lindy was not the only one who regarded Tony's fiddling propensities with disapprobation. The doctor, driving in from the country, hot, and worried, and anxious about his "case," passing close by the sweet-gum tree, that grew just off the road, would swear mildly as the first plaintive notes of Tony's fiddle reached his ears, pronouncing it a blanked "shame that Myers should shelter that vagrant, instead of helping to rid the county of him." The Judge's wife, missing her imported Plymouth Rock cock one day, and a lot of "broilers" the next, and bitterly conscious of a steady depletion in the ranks of her poultry, declared in tones of conviction that it was "nobody but that fiddling free darkey down there in the hollow, stealing them." But as there was never even a feather discovered in the neighborhood of the cow-house, and Tony and Lindy certainly did not look as if they ate much broiled chicken, there was no ground for action.

Tony made a dollar and a half once in a single night, and this sudden influx of prosperity had an appreciable effect upon his bearing for a whole week afterward. The occasion was a wedding in high life. The groom himself made application for Tony and his fiddle, or, as Mrs. Tony sarcastically put it, for "de fiddle and Tony." Lindy's outburst of irony on this occasion was caused by her not being included in the invitation to the wedding. Tony was a necessity, but she, being in a low condition of society, without the open sesame of a fiddle, could not be in-

cluded in a list of invitations that recognized the retainers of F. F. V.'s exclusively. The groom-elect found Tony sitting on an inverted mackerel kit in the back door of the cow-house, extracting the most soothing and nerve-quieting strains from his violin for the benefit of Lindy, who was rasping the family wearing apparel over the face of an exceedingly rough washboard. The suds flew from her vigorous fists in great snowy flecks, smiting Tony in the eyes and on the cheeks occasionally, which necessitated a break in the melody while he applied a very ragged shirt sleeve to the wet spot, but produced no more violent protest.

"I'se come to gi'e you a fus'-class job, ol' man." Thus the groom-elect, looking down patronizingly upon the musician on the mackerel kit.

Tony laid his violin across his knee, and looked up at him. Lindy, catching the word "job," flung the suds from her arms and came forward, wiping her hands on her blue-checked apron.

"I'se gwine to be married t'night," the gentleman from the big house continued, thrusting his hands into his trowsers pockets, "en Mars Jimmie, he say he don' wan' no quarter nigger doin's 'bout it" (Mars Jimmie was the Colonel's oldest son, home from Yale only a little while, and this was Lem, his body servant, who drove those spanking grays, and sat in the buggy so patiently while Mars Jimmie was "sparking" the doctor's daughter). "I'se gwine t'be j'ined in de ban's uv holy wedlock to Miss Marfy Ann. She waits on ol' Miss, and Mars Jimmie say he gwine see it done up in style. I come to 'gage you to

play for us. We gwine to be married in de big house hall."

Tony stood up respectfully and glanced down at his tatters. Then he looked anxiously toward Lindy. But Lindy was just then wondering if it would have "hurted" Aunt Betsy to send her "a invite" too. Marfy Ann, she knew, was Aunt Betsy's daughter. "I mout 'a' helped some wid de supper," she thought bitterly.

"I ain' skursely fitt'n to fiddle at de big house, Lem," Tony says finally. "I mout git laughed at by de folks."

"Is dem de bes' duds you got?" Lem asks frankly, placidly surveying Tony from head to foot.

"De ve'y bes'."

"Then I 'lows I'll hafter sen' you some down. You don' hafter go to de big house. We gwine t' dance in de crib, but I don' wan' no sech buzzard fiddlin' at my weddin'. Mars Jimmie say it all got to be firs'-class."

There was no resentment in Tony's heart at this candid slur upon his personal appearance. Lem was privileged. He belonged to the first white people in the county, and Tony had the misfortune to belong to nobody at all. Lem sent him the promised suit of clothes, and the combined influence of being well dressed and well fed told so happily upon the inner man that he played as no one had ever heard him play, and Mars Jimmie, coming up from the big house with a company of visitors to see how the "break-down" was progressing, himself handed him the dollar and a half to which he dated back long afterward.

But it was that summer when the cholera broke out that Tony and Lindy realized the full bitterness of belonging to no one. This fell disease always attacks their race with peculiar virulence. Their habits invite it. The plantations were deserted. Owners, careful of their property, moved their slaves out by the wagon-loads to the sweet, pure woods, where they formed encampments and lived like nomads in tents, and were fed and cared for, and took no more thought of the morrow than the lilies of the field. Only Tony and Lindy stayed on in the old cow-house, with no one to care much what became of them. When it got out that one of Tony's boys was "down," the doctor, going his rounds, stopped his buggy under the sweet-gum, got out, and going in, ministered to the small sufferer, supplying medicines from his leather case, and giving Lindy minute directions about the care and diet of the family; but the doctor was doing the work of ten men just then and could not stay very long.

Another one of the boys was taken that night, and then Tony, and then Lindy. It was gloomy times at the cow-house. Tony never had made much of an outcry against fate, and he didn't now. The cow-house door stood open day and night. The pigs walked in occasionally, stood with their heads raised inquiringly, sniffed at the baby in the cradle, where the flies swarmed thickest, and walked out disgustedly. Tony's fiddle was laid up on the joist over the door. It was very silent about the cabin, and it grew dark down there on the edge of the woods very fast. There were long black vistas stretching away from behind the

sweet-gum into the thick forests that belonged to the Myers place. It was on the second day after Tony and Lindy had both been stricken, and he was lying there wondering dismally who would be "down" next, that he saw an angel coming toward him along this dark woodland path. It moved forward swiftly and quietly until it stood on the threshold of the cow-house. Its raiment was pure white, and its eyes shone with a starry radiance as they tried to pierce the gloom of the cabin. The angel seemed to halt with a very human reluctance, and then it sent a sweet human voice ahead of it to ask :

"Tony and Lindy, are you in here?"

"Yessum," Tony answered almost in a whisper, for it might be the Angel of Death come to take him and Lindy and the little ones to a land where there was neither bond nor free, and he shouldn't like to lose any chance of getting to a better place. But it was only the Angel of Pity, and there, just behind her, was Aunt Betsy. He had not noticed at first any thing but the White Angel coming toward him out of the shadows. Aunt Betsy put down a heavy basket just inside the door, and scratching a match against the side of the cabin, she applied it to a candle she had brought with her. The White Angel uttered a little groan when the feeble illumination showed her the state of affairs, and Aunt Betsy said curtly :

"I tol' you you couldn' stan' it, Missy," and Tony discovered then that it was "Missy" from the big house.

Tony and Lindy had never had any grudge against "w'ite folks." They had never even speculated upon

the injustice of Fate in failing to supply them with white folks of their own ; but now for the first time they tasted the sweets of being cared for and looked after as if they were of some importance in God's great universe, and, ignominious to relate, they would gladly have bartered their birthright of liberty for the messes of pottage brought by Aunt Betsy from the big house, or for the delightful sensation of being ordered about by Missy.

Of course Tony and Lindy did not die. There was no especial point in keeping them alive, but Missy's sympathies having been enlisted by Aunt Betsy's representations, the people at the cow-house became a sort of hobby with her, and they never lacked a patron saint after that cholera summer.

Long after Tony had taken up the old fiddling life, with occasional interruptions in the way of jobs, he used to wonder if there wasn't something he could do for " Missy " by way of showing the gratitude that thrilled every fiber of his gaunt frame. But there is so little the worshiping devotee can do for his patron saint. Tony never cut down a bee-tree in the woods but the whitest of the comb was saved for Missy, and when he chanced to kill a blue heron he plucked the soft downy plumes out with infinite care for her adorning ; but all this was inadequate. He longed to do something for Missy that she could remember always, as he must always remember the night when she came toward his cabin from the gloom and darkness and shed a radiance all around about his miserable home.

After many days Tony's chance came to him. It

came to him early in the days when every body was free, and the stigma of "free nigger" was removed from him and Lindy, and other folks had to scramble a good deal as they had always done. There was a certain sort of balm in it all.

Ol' Miss lay dying. There was no men-folks up at the big house then. The Colonel and Mars' Jimmie were fighting in the neighborhood of Richmond. There were plenty of men in town, but they all wore the blue uniform of the liberators. Tony reaped something of a harvest in those garrison days. The men liked to hear him play, and as he had always been free, they liked to question him. He was not under the bondage of fear that sealed the old slaves' lips. He picked up a good many dimes from them, which helped to make things more comfortable, and he picked up something else. He picked up a secret which he kept to himself dumbly.

Ol' Miss lay dying, up at the big house, and "Missy" was in sore straits. Aunt Betsy clung to her but nobody else. The men down at the barracks said they were going to search the house for arms, one night, "sick woman or no sick woman." Tony heard it. There was no use hiding things from him.

The rain began to fall that night in that slow, steady, dismal fashion so trying to the strongest nerves. It fell on the shingle roof of the big house with a sullen patter, it dripped from the mossy eaves to the violet borders around the gallery with a dreary regularity that sounded like stealthy footsteps, it rustled in the leaves of the rose-bushes with ghostly whisperings. There were no lights in the big house, only a faint

glimmer from the lamp sitting on the floor behind the washstand in Ol' Miss's room. Aunt Betsy sat wide awake in a chair by the bed. There was nothing for her to do but to wait. Missy stole from the room out upon the gallery in restless misery. The scent of the damp earth greeted her, mingled with the heavy perfume of cape jessamines and honeysuckles. She heard the soft patter of the rain on the violet beds, and then she heard something else—a slow, steady, stealthy foot-fall. She placed herself behind one of the big pillars and listened with bated breath. It was too dark to see any thing. It came nearer ; it reached the corner of the violet beds ; now it was at the front steps. Whoever it he was, was coming in—no, he had passed on. Presently the foot-fall sounded again, just where she had at first heard it. The clouds parted suddenly to let the full moon shed its light upon a tall form wrapped in a blue overcoat. The same moon-beam revealed Missy, white, wan, and alert with terror.

“ Missy ! ” The call came to her softly, but she was afraid to answer. Then the man in the uniform came close to the pillar against which she was leaning for support. It was Tony.

“ Missy,” he said, “ don't be skeered. Tony's got a gun here, and he jis' 'lowed he'd loaf roun' to see nobody didn't pester you t'night. I's gwine to play patterole, honey, so you kin git a good night's res'. You kin trus' Tony, Missy.”

She thanked him with tears in her voice, and went back to the room where Aunt Betsy was watching and Ol' Miss was waiting.



Nobody ever knew where Tony got that Federal uniform and that gun—stole them most probably. Nobody ever knew that it answered his purpose by “scaring ” away the men who meant to search the big house that night. Nobody ever knew that it was Tony who, representing Missy’s case at head-quarters the next morning, secured her against molestation. But he succeeded in doing something she remembered all the days of her life. That was all he asked.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MISS FLO'S HARVEST.

WHEN Marshall, the hostler on the Colonel's hill place, is seen walking toward the stables of mornings with his head drooped dejectedly and his brawny arms folded across his chest, while his jolly round face is lengthened to its utmost capacity, somewhat as if he were following an invisible hearse containing the remains of his best friend, and abstractedly grooms the carriage horses with the back of a brush to a hymn in slow meter : when Uncle Reuben lays down the garden-line he has prepared to stretch across the cabbage bed, where he is about to set out the young plants with geometrical precision, for the sole purpose of jumping over the garden-fence to inflict condign punishment upon Sam for whistling "Captain Jinks" as he drives the calves to water : when breakfast gets a little later every morning, and Aunt Minervy grinds the coffee solemnly to the tune of "Satan's waitin', yes, a-waitin' fur my soul," and displays a disposition to soar above such groveling details as pin-feathers in the broiled chickens, or a reckless quantity of soda in the biscuit : when 'Mandy leaves the scrubbing-mop and her bucket of soft-soap in the middle of the big house hall, while she runs down to the front gate to tell "Sis Santhy" about

Vance's seeing the devil in his cotton-row yesterday in the shape of a white rabbit, with whom he held fearless and defiant converse : when Aunt Rosetta tunelessly requests the Angel of Death to come on his milk-white "speed" and take her up to glory, with exalted indifference to the fate of the milk she is distributing impartially between the piggin and the ground it rests on ; then the people at the big house know that protracted meeting is at hand, and Miss Flo's eyes begin to glow with a mild species of acquisitiveness.

The time of her annual harvest is approaching, and needs must that she should gather it very closely. It is not precisely a harvesting after her own heart ; it is rather the hasty snatching of a few grains of compensation from many bushels of discomfort. Miss Flo has learned to appreciate the day of small things ; and when, by token of all the infallible signs here given, she knows that protracted meeting is at hand, and will certainly culminate in a big baptizing in the creek that runs musically and merrily over its pebbly bottom through the place to meet the river, she judiciously casts about in her mind's eye to decide what more she can dispense with from her private wardrobe and to overhaul the fashion-books.

Miss Flo's feelings at the approach of this solemn festival are by no means unmixed. She has never gotten over that trick of flushing redly whenever one of the ladies from the quarters expresses serious dissatisfaction with her method of draping and fitting, and she takes herself roundly to task for objecting to the discomfort of having people ride over from other plan-

tations with their purchases of dry goods tied up in bandanna handkerchiefs to inquire if she can make a "coat" within the prescribed limits of their time and purse. She takes herself to task because, having deliberately concluded that this was her only way of escaping dependence, she can't see why she must wince afresh at every bargain she drives.

Miss Flo is the Colonel's sister, and lives at the hill place with him. Before the war she owned slaves, but no land. The Colonel worked her slaves and paid her hire for them. In those days life was a very pleasant thing, filled up with easy-going, lady-like concerns that involved a leisurely amount of reading and riding and visiting and being visited, and flower culture, and so on. People used to say Miss Flo was indolent. She never could bring herself to do any thing that required decided exertion, whether physical or mental. In the days when she was a slave-owner, and had to take no anxious thought for the morrow, she used to get through with an incredible amount of fancy-work. She had a fixed chair in a fixed corner of the family sitting-room, where she would sit and rock slowly, while she worked on a piece of fine, eye-trying embroidery for personal decoration or on gorgeous stuffed crewel-work for sofa cushions. Every household in the family connection has a pair of sofa cushions of Miss Flo's embroidering. She was a pleasant and placid fixture in the family circle—one of those admirable organizations that never get out of order, and can be warranted to run (so to speak) without needing any regulating for an incredible space of time.

That she was still Miss Flo was (or had been at first) a matter of surprise to every body who knew her. But people had ceased speculating about her long since, for it had been almost an engagement between her and Larry Stacy (whose father's plantation joined the Colonel's) before the war, and every body looked for their marriage when Larry came home, a battle-scarred hero, with only one leg and an ugly red mark across his handsome cheek. But it never came off, and, as time went by, his friends said she had flinched from fulfilling her promise because of that ugly red mark and his wooden leg, and silently pronounced condemnation on her for a "heartless creature"; and her friends said Larry Stacy had meant to have stocked the wild lands his father had given him with her negroes, and had no use for her after her riches had taken themselves off, not on the traditional wings that riches are said to be expert in the use of, but on a lot of very sturdy legs; and they silently pronounced condemnation on him for a "mercenary wretch"; and so things had settled themselves on an entirely new basis, Miss Flo becoming more than ever of a fixture in the corner of the family sitting-room, and Larry Stacy gradually becoming absorbed in the management of the plantation that was his now that his father was dead.

In the fall of the year, when the frost stripped the leaves from the trees in the pasture land that lay between the two plantations, the two big houses were visible to each other, and often the Colonel and Larry would ride over each other's crops together, or hunt snipe and duck in company, sometimes going back to

Larry's house to enjoy the fruits of their industry socially ; but it was an understood thing that Larry was never to stop at the Colonel's. Fate had fixed a gulf that time seemed unable to bridge. But very few words had ever been expended on it.

It was in those early days after the war, when it seemed incumbent upon every one to put his hand to the plow, that Miss Flo began casting about for a plow to put her hand to. She couldn't teach music. There were ten women wanting to teach music for every possible pupil in the country. A school was not feasible where miles intervened between every place, and perhaps only one or two children on each plantation. The Colonel, in common with all his neighbors, was burdened with debt, and had a large family of his own. She couldn't eat the bread of dependence, even if it was supplied ungrudgingly by a brother's hand. She, who had never earned a cent of money in her life, told herself positively that she "must earn her own living"; must find her plow. It was during those stringent times that she extracted her first grain of compensation from the bushel of discomfort always entailed by protracted meeting. Aunt Minervy, the Colonel's cook, had unwittingly indicated to Miss Flo the location of her plow ; she had put her hand to it promptly and had never looked back, indeed, had even come to regard the annual return of "'stracted meetin'" as a cloud with a very decided silver lining.

The dress-making and bonnet-trimming business had grown immensely on her hands since that night, when, after she had gone up stairs to her own bedroom, consciously weighed down by the burden of a

fruitless day, there came a tapping at her chamber door, and Aunt Minervy entered, almost filling the dainty little apartment with her huge personality. She looked abashed as she stood before the young lady, twirling the kitchen key a trifle nervously in her shining fingers. Aunt Minervy had been *Aunt Minervy* ever since Miss Flo could remember—capable, kind, black, and jolly. When she had any thing to say to her “w’ite folks,” touching her own concerns, she was given to apologetic prefaces that were apt to prove prolix. On the present occasion it was evident she had an unusual request to prefer, and her preface was proportionately strung out.

“I’s e got frew in de kitchen, honey. Ary yother nigger would ‘a jus’ slop things over any which-a-way; but Minervy ain’ none er dat sort doa dese cert’nly is times uv refreshin’ en’ I ‘lows w’en I wuz scrubbin’ off de sheffs t’ night dat Br’er Tucker would ‘a got frew prayin’ fo’ I come in sight, but dat make no diffunce to Minervy. I sez, nigger, dirt is dirt, en soap is soap, en Br’er Tucker’s pra’r wouldn’ set well, honey, ef dem messed up kitchen shelves be’n h’antin’ me all frew meetin’; so den, dat make me say w’at I does say, dese triflin’ young ones dat is comin’ on ain’ wuth de powder it ‘ud tek t’ blow ‘em up wid, ‘kase I tol’ Milly to scrub dem sheffs whilst I wuz mekin’ de col’ slaw for you-all’s Sunday dinner. I ain’t gwine to starve my w’ite folks ‘kase ‘stracted meetin’s gwine on, honey. I ‘lowed fo’ I step up home to res’ my ol’ bones some, I’d jus’ sorter feel roun’ t’ see if you kin help de ol’ woman to fix up some fur de baptizin’. Der ‘ll be a power uv folks yhere nex’ Sunday. Dey’ll

jus' swarm lak bees in swarmin' times, en I don' wan' de folks to go back home en say Kyernil Barker's cook was de Jo Bunkis' critter at de baptizin'. I lef' you plenty uv sof' gingerbread in de dinin'-room safe, honey. Minervy a'in' forgit w'at her chile like bes'. You see, Miss Flo', folks sorter 'xpects somethin' frum me 'kase my w'ite folks is quality; en w'en I cuts a dash, den dey t'inks my w'ite folks is all right, but w'en I 'pears at meetin' lak a w'ip rooster wid he's tail fedders all gone, den dey say folks at de Kyernil's mus' be runnin' down at de heels. I knows how folks talk, Minervy ain' be'n in dis worl' forty year fur nothin'. You needn' be sparin' wid de light bread t'morrer, honey. I'll set some mo' t' rise in the mornin'."

A direct inquiry into the nature of Aunt Minervy's immediate wants brought her a little nearer to the underlying cause of this visitation.

"Well, you see, honey, yo' br'er George, he pays me ten dollars a month fur cookin' fur de w'ite folks. W'at good dat ten dollars do me w'en I twelve mile fum a sto', en nuthin' but a passel uv thievin' young ones t' spen' it fur me ef I don' git ahead uv 'em en spen' it myself? Den I sez (I wuz thinkin' 'bout it, honey, whilst I was mekin' de floatin'-island fur you t' top off wid t'morrer), why don' you go right-smack up to Miss Flo en tell her ef she'll give you dat black grenadeer coat er hern, wid de gimpure lace on de bas', en her las' summer flat wid de red roses on it, en' a lace scarf t' war roun' yo' neck, en a hoop skyirt, honey, en mebbe a par uv ol' stockin's you don't want ter pester 'bout darnin', dat you'll squar counts dis



month wid Mars George (and sometimes, honey, it do look lak squeezin' blood outen a turnip t' git money out'n our w'ite folks) so I jes' finish fixin' up yo' Sunday's dinner en lock it up in de dinin'-room safe, honey, 'fo' I comes up yhere to ax you would you trade wid me."

Miss Flo looked at Minervy's generous proportions and thought of the pretty black grenadine she had cherished as one of her most elegant antebellum possessions. The two did not go well together at all. She suggested its insufficient dimensions ; Aunt Minervy suggested its possible enlargement. She thought of her brother's perplexed and anxious face whenever pay-day returned, which it seemed to do with cruel frequency, and resolved to "trade."

And that was the beginning of it. Aunt Minerva in the black grenadine had proved a splendid advertisement and had been a shining mark for envious admiration at the big baptizing, and the colonel had looked so relieved when she told him he didn't need to pay his cook any cash that month, that she felt quite rewarded for the sacrifice of the grenadine with the lace-trimmed basque.

After that it came to be a tacit understanding that Miss Flo was to be appealed to in all matters of dress and fashion, until, from the original sale of obsolete finery and made-over bonnets, she got to be a dress-maker at first hand, and whenever any body saw a colored lady ambling slowly toward the big house on Pebbly Creek with a well-stuffed bandanna handkerchief swaying from the pommel of her saddle, or filling all the space in front of her, it was safe to predict that

there was more work on hand for Miss Flo and more gorgeousness for the quarters.

And now "'stracted meetin'" was again in progress, and another big baptizing was imminent, and the reason Miss Flo's eyes "glowed with mild acquisitiveness" was because her exchequer was completely depleted, and she did *so very much* want to send a flower-list North and get a lot of those wonderful new violets and fuchsias that showed up so marvelously in the cuts in the back of all the periodicals. She had never grown quite accustomed to take orders from her lady patronesses, and a glimpse into her workshop (where bed, and bureau, and table were sometimes piled high with dress goods that frequently suggested the star spangled banner and Dolly Varden all rolled into one), sometimes showed the owner of all this gorgeousness standing in an attitude of deprecating meekness before the statuesque young woman whom fate had assigned her for a mantua-maker.

The harvest this year promised to be better than on any previous occasion. There had been nothing special to dampen the hopes of the planters or storekeepers; so credit was easy to obtain and with the reckless unthrift of the race, the prospect of a year's livelihood was willingly bartered for the fleeting glory of a barbaric display at the baptizing. It was to take place in Pebbly Creek, so Miss Flo and the Colonel's family must perforce be eye-witnesses of the proceedings, as the bridge that spanned the creek just in front of the house made too good a platform for the exhorters to be overlooked.

It was on the eve of the momentous day that Miss

Flo was summoned mysteriously from the family circle by a dark upraised hand in the dimly-lighted hall, and a softly uttered "Miss Flo, please, ma'am." She responded promptly, but started slightly as she found herself face to face with Larry Stacy's body-servant. It was Jeff. She knew him well, for in the old days when Larry used to come over so often in the buggy, sometimes to stay all the evening, at others just to take her for a long, swift, delicious drive through the sweet-scented country roads, Jeff was always on hand, and it had seemed to her then that Jeff's keen black eyes had penetrated the secret that she had much rather had hidden from the eyes of all the world. She seldom saw him now. She had heard that he was true as steel in Larry's time of trouble, and had clung to him as faithfully in his dark days as in his bright ones. Perhaps it was this knowledge that made it easy for her to greet him kindly after that first start of surprise. He retreated before her until he had decoyed her well out of ear-shot of the rest, and then said stammeringly, whirling his old felt hat about nervously the while :

"Miss Flo, I come to ax a 'commodashun from you. I'se one uv de toters t'morrer at de baptizin', en I 'lowed you could help me to get fixed up. I wants a black coat en a vest, en Mars Larry, you see, Mars Larry's mouty peaked dese days. I kyarn' git into his'n, en' I thought maybe you'd seil me one er de Colonel's, jus' fur ol' time's sake, Miss Flo."

Miss Flo leaned a trifle heavily on the table in the hall that was littered with the week's accumulation of newspapers and magazines. Her first inclination had

been toward the ludicrous view of Larry Stacy's body-servant coming to her with such a petition.

The position of "toter" was a time-honored and dignified one, decided by lot, only individuals of tried pluck and unquestioned muscle being eligible thereto. 'Stracted meetin' and big baptizings were prolific of hysteria. The sisters were much given to shouting themselves into a state of collapse, and the interests of good order demanded that there should always be some four or five muscular "toters" detailed to bear the wriggling, squirming, kicking, moaning mass of humanity into the receiving room prepared for the sufferers. The lot had fallen upon Jeff this time, and he was minded to do himself credit. He and the Colonel were so exactly of one size that it had occurred to him that Miss Flo's intercession in his behalf was all that would be necessary for his fitting adornment.

But that allusion to Larry Stacy's altered condition and to old times had taken the whole affair out of the realm of the ridiculous for Miss Flo. Jeff had been good to his master all these years, and with a meekness of spirit that surprised herself she felt impelled to send him back home happy. Why should she care who knew? And yet she did. She wondered if Jeff, in the confidence of a life-long attendance on his master, had imparted his intentions in this matter to him. She was relieved when he voluntarily added :

"Mars' Larry 'ud skin me ef he knowed I'd pestered you, bnt de folks tells me you's mighty 'commodatin', Miss Flo, en ef de boss don't 'ject."

The boss did not object, and Jeff went home the proud possessor of a coat the Colonel had discarded

as soon after the war as he could reopen negotiations with his city tailor. The "confounded thing" pinched him in the arm-holes, and the Colonel had never yet voluntarily submitted to be pinched by any thing. Miss Flo fretted mildly over the matter, wishing she felt quite sure that she had done the right thing, and finally concluding, with a passionate burst of tears, that she did not "care two bits whether Larry Stacy, with the whole of the rest of the world thrown in, knew how she made her living."

The morning of the big baptizing was perfect for the purpose, and the procession of the pilgrims began to file past the big house early in the morning—so early, in fact, that the Colonel, who was blackening his own shoes on the tool chest on the back gallery, looked up in some surprise at the soft rumble of wheels out in the dusty road. It was a brand-new buggy with a shining top, and the black horse that was in its shafts stepped out briskly, proudly conscious of his glittering new harness. The man that held the reins had been reared under the Colonel's eye as his own body attendant. He lived on the Sprague place now, fifteen miles further back, and had come early because he had to drive the parson over to Pebbly Creek. The Colonel was portly, and never had blackened his own shoes, save under protest. Perhaps it was the stooping over the tool-chest that sent the blood in such a rush to his head as Lemuel raised his new hat gracefully and waved him a greeting across the yard fence. He returned the greeting with an indifferent "How'ye, boys," before applying himself with savage energy to his left shoe,

but he muttered something between his teeth about "bottom rails being on top," or something of that sort. The Colonel has not the making of a philosopher in him.

In the absence of other amusement or even distraction on that long empty Sunday morning, the folks at the big house, grouped idly on the front gallery, watched the "swarming," as Aunt Minerva had appropriately called it. All the early hours of the day saw the innumerable caravan filing by the front gate on foot, on horseback, by wagon loads, in smart buggies, by twos and threes and crowds, laden with hampers of prepared food or thriftlessly depending upon a possible repetition of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Crying babies and whistling boys, important looking matrons and shame-faced girls who stole sheepish sidewise glances at Miss Flo as she sat on the gallery, pale and dainty and pretty, amused at the proprietary interest she felt in a large proportion of the gorgeous costumes that were flaunted before her eyes on that bright spring morning, and sordidly making a mental calculation of the sum total of this year's "protracted meeting business." That was what she called it.

It was not an unpicturesque sight, down there on the side of the creek, where the crowd finally settled after swarming. The pale green slopes of the banks just fairly clothed with spring verdure, with the trees clustering close to the water's edge, furnished a pleasant background for the restless mass of dark faces and brilliantly clad forms. A little way back was pitched the white tent, where the exhausted shouters

were to be "toted," dripping from immersion, by Jeff and his coadjutors. Further back still, with Aunt Minerva in command, a busy brigade was spreading the contents of the hampers on the cotton sheets that were spread upon the grass to receive them, but such mundane duties were soon merged in the higher interest of the baptizing. Grouped on the low bridge the preacher and the subjects for immersion made an effective tableau. The people on the gallery could not distinguish words, but they knew from the wild waving of his long arms, and the wilder swaying of the immense throng, and the swelling of the weird wailing of the singers, and the moaning and the groaning, that the exhorter was under full headway, and that the frenzy was upon them.

Who would dare make it a matter of jest or ridicule? They were under the spell of a terrible earnestness. For the time being they were worshipers. Ignorantly but zealously they worshiped, in their uncontrolled boisterous fashion. While that frenzy endured the furbelows that had engaged their simple imaginations for weeks beforehand sank suddenly into their proper insignificance. The wrong-doing that was voluntarily and tremblingly confessed out there under the blue of the sky and the tender green of the over-arching trees was the only real and awful thing in life. While the spell of that sonorous voice was upon them, they repented them truly and humbly of all their sins of omission and commission. Perhaps conscience even smote some of them with sharp regret for their ill-gotten contributions to the collation they would placidly help to consume in the calmer after

hours. For the time being repentance was genuine and remorse was keen. What would you of a herd of overgrown, untaught children, blind followers of blind leaders, swayed by their emotions, all unconscious of their own possession of any better guide than impulse?

But it was neither with such sage moral reflections as these, nor with the swaying, shouting, hysterical crowd down there on the pebbly banks of the creek, that Miss Flo's eyes or mind were long engaged. She alone had seen a buggy driven out of the woods on the other side of the creek, had seen its driver glance down at the impedimenta on the bridge, and then respectfully settle himself to wait for an opportunity to cross it. His attitude was one of absolute patience. It was Larry Stacy!

No one ever crossed that bridge who was not coming straight up to the house where Miss Flo sat with hands rigidly folded in her lap and her strained eyes gazing across at the buggy on the opposite side. He had turned the horse's head slightly, so as not to seem to be an idle spectator of the excited scene before him. And there he stayed until the last violent splash had been taken in the clear waters of the creek, and the last soaked convert had been "toted" to the tent by Jeff in the Colonel's coat, and the overwrought crowd had swayed away from the bridge towards the white cloths on the grass, where it promptly dissolved into so many hungry, grasping, every-day atoms. Then, with a slight touch of the whip on his horse's flanks, Larry Stacy headed him toward the bridge, and drove straight to the Colonel's front gate.



The family, all but Miss Flo, recognized him with a start of surprise. "Larry Stacy! what's up?" the Colonel said under his breath before going quickly into the hall for his hat, that he might help his crippled neighbor from the buggy at the gate.

Miss Flo was "up," and gone too, by the time the two men reached the front steps. She mentally called herself no end of absurd names as she rushed through the hall to gain the shelter of the darkened parlor, but she simply could not sit there with Larry Stacy in front of her, maimed, wounded, and oh! so much older looking. It was barbarous of him driving there in that fashion. She supposed her selling that coat to Jeff was at the bottom of it. Yes, her selling that to Jeff was at the bottom of it. She heard Larry ask pointedly for her, in such a strange voice. She could have fancied it trembled if there had been any reason in such an idea.

He walked straight past them all and came there to her, where she sat in the cool dark parlor, trembling, she scarcely knew why. She rose to meet him and asked him to be seated with admirable composure, for which she took great credit to herself, but instead he stood up in front of her and held out an open letter, such an old, dusty, rumped-looking letter as it was, too, and said what he had to say in a very few abrupt words.

"Miss Florence, before I came back to the plantation after the war, indeed, when I was in hospital having this attachment fixed" (touching his wooden leg) "I wrote a letter to you telling you I had always meant to ask you to be my wife, that I loved you, but

felt, in my crippled state, it was worse than audacious to address you as a lover. I asked you in that letter to write to me if you had any thing kind to say to me, but that if you had not, to leave me unanswered and I should know what it meant. I never got any answer to that letter, and I thought I knew what it meant. But last night Jeff brought me this. He told me he found it in the lining of a coat he had—had—gotten over here. Read it, please. It's a little over-due, only about four years, but I would like to know how you would have answered it if you had ever read it. I know you haven't, because the seal is unbroken."

He held it out to her. You could have heard his heart beat while he stood there waiting for her to read that dusty old letter from beginning to end. How deliberate she was, and how intensely quiet her voice was as she asked :

"If you could change the date of that letter to to-day, would you write it just the same?"

"Just the same," he answered huskily.

Then two soft cool hands went out to him in the darkened parlor, and with a tender cooing sound he heard himself called "Poor Larry; poor, dear, lonely Larry," in tones that sent the blood in a glad torrent from his heart to his face, and made the scar on his brave face gleam redly for a second.

And now when Miss Flo makes her mental calculation anent the profits of that year's protracted meeting, the old coat she sold Jeff possesses such a marvelous faculty of outweighing every thing on earth that

she gives the sum up. The only unhappy and remorseful person to be found at Pebbly Creek now is the Colonel, whose habitual carelessness was at the bottom of so cruel and prolonged a separation.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### AN OLD ROMAN.

THE fact that he was called "Judge," and so addressed, and so referred to in the local newspapers, does not indicate that he had ever held any judicial position in his county, or that he had any aspirations toward the bench ; so far from such being the case, he looked upon counselors-at-law, recorders, judges, in short, all of their kind, with a sort of lenient pity as a lot of poor devils who had to trim their sails to accommodate every fickle popular breeze and adjust their principles to the exigencies of their cases.

Such a necessity, or rather his conception of such a necessity alone, would have militated fatally against the Judge's ever adopting the legal profession, for "principle" was the watchword of his life, and it was in his readiness to make any and every sacrifice for it that he resembled the old Roman he has been likened to. His bearing was senatorial, so was his flowing white beard. Given a toga and a fiercer looking nose, and the Judge might have posed picturesquely for the noblest Roman of them all ; might still, in fact, though it would be a mutilated Roman, with an armless sleeve.

On a grassy slope in the outskirts of a sleepy little town in ——— County, Mississippi, stands a house plainly visible to passers-by in the road. Its lawn slopes greenly away from it on three sides, guiltless of parterre or cultivation of any sort. An unpainted picket fence, afflicted with chronic weakness, surrounds this immense grassy expanse, into which is let at one corner, in an irrelevant sort of fashion, a heavy gate, which gapes as widely to let a baby through as it does for an express wagon. By which you will perceive the gates around the Judge's demesne are not built on the scientific principles that Newton applied to the holes cut under his door for the accommodation of his cats—a big one for the cat and a little one for the kitten. On the apex of this lawn stands a gray, unpainted frame house, with big windows, and doors that let in no end of light and sunshine in summer and an equally unlimited amount of cold draught in winter. There is a dormer room over the big-pillared front portico, and from time immemorial there has been just one pane of glass out of the sash in that window. In the railing about the portico there has also been just one baluster missing for a long time. Neither the absent pane of glass nor the missing baluster affected the peace and comfort of the family to any great extent, until a strolling photographer stopped in front of the lawn, and pointing his instrument at the old gray house, without a moment's warning, perpetuated these deficiencies, but made such a pretty picture of the old house, with its dark conical cedars peeping around one gable end, and its three grand old oaks outlining the

crumbling back terrace, that, in spite of the dreadful permanence thus given to the staring vacancy in the dormer window and the toothless rail below, the Judge's family prize this memento of the old homestead above every thing.

• If the picture could have taken in the two rose-bushes that have survived the war, one a mammoth red monthly that claims more territory from the grassy lawn every year, the other a "sunset" rose that shades its golden and pink petals in a fragrant shower in the very earliest spring-time, it would have been prettier. These two roses exemplify the survival of the fittest. Before the war the gray house could not be seen from the road at all. The grassy lawn was then a garden, kept sightly by a Scotch gardener who held sway over it, and over a tiny little vine-wreathed cottage in the vegetable garden below the terraces, where the three ragged-topped oaks now stand.

Then, when the Judge's family grouped itself about the low, broad stuccoed front steps, they only knew when vehicles were passing by the clouds of dust that rose over the tall heads of the jessamines and azaleas and sweet olives and "burning bushes" that shut them in, and by the soft rumble of dust-smothered wheels. But there came a day when military necessity sent axes ringing and plows upturning and shovels desecrating the lovely grounds, and ugly earthworks, bristling with black-mouthed cannon, took the places of the sweet olives and the jessamines. The earthworks have been leveled long ago and only a green welt here and

there on the lawn tells where they used to be, showing like scars that have rudely healed over ; but it is because the family hold in such tender reverence the old-time glories of the place, and see its sharp contrasts so plainly, that such isolated defects as that missing pane of glass and lacking baluster fail of due impressiveness.

This gray house is where the Judge lived, really lived. Over in Louisiana and up in Arkansas there were three plantations and many slaves that called him master, but the slaves and the plantations were all tributary to the home "in the hills" (as Mississippi lands were always called, in contradistinction to Louisiana swamps).

Independently of that great wealth which gives a man prominence in any and every locality, the Judge's position in his own neighborhood was an enviable one. His judgment was beyond question on the differing grades of cotton or the advisability of mixed crops, and his prophecies concerning the probabilities of each season were received with profound consideration. Young men rather appreciated the privilege of saying, "Judge Strong remarked to me the other day," etc.; it was indicative of access, you see, to one of the most potent personalities in the county. As a financier he excelled, and his views, obtained either directly or indirectly, decided the final disposition of many thousands of dollars among his own neighbors. Not that he aspired to leadership of any sort. No man ever lived who was more absolutely content to mind his own business ; but he had had prominence thrust upon

him, and he accepted it with the reserved dignity that was characteristic of him in all things. Perhaps the fact that he never had aspired to this prominence, but that it had been a voluntary tribute, stood him in good stead when he was called on to test the fickleness of popular opinion, as he was when his state came to secede. It was then that he appreciated popularity at its true worth.

The chief impetus and momentum of the secession movement was drawn, in its earliest days, from the heated blood of restless young spirits, alert to perceive indignity and resent injury, whether real or imaginary. There could be but one course of action open to Southerners of true mettle. He who hesitated was lost. Unfortunately so few hesitated that those who did became the immediate marks for a most undesirable sort of conspicuity. Whosoever was not for the secession of a State was against the true interest of its people.

It was in those early turbulent days that people began to consider the Judge's position with investigating curiosity. He had apparently assumed an attitude of aloofness that laid him open to the dark suspicion of being a Union man. Somebody made cautious note of the fact that he was not in attendance at the enthusiastic mass meeting held in the Methodist church, because it was the biggest building in town, to indorse South Carolina's impetuosity in going out; somebody else perceived that it was with the lenient indulgence of senility to infancy that he looked on calmly at the frantic industry with which the boys fell to drilling, marching through town at all



hours of the day with their bayonets criss-crossing each other like poorly planted pea-sticks ; one well versed in the legislation of the county recalled to mind how the Judge's oldest son, in the legislative halls of the State, had opposed and defeated what was called the " Free Negro Bill," which bore somewhat heavily on the colored population so unfortunate as not to own a master.

Plainly a strong case was making against the Judge, and people no longer deferred respectfully to his opinion on any subject. Suspicion culminated on the day that Mississippi seceded. There was a tremendous fanfare over it that drew nearly all the town into the vortex of the wildest excitement ; but the Judge, sitting at home, shielded from unfriendly observation by the sheltering roses and vines in his shrub-crowded garden, only dropped his head upon his breast until his long white beard touched the watch-fob at his waist and sighed. The next day he stood on the high bluff that overlooked the river, mute, while the surging crowd was clamoring over the majestic salutes the great incoming steamers, just up from New Orleans, were making with flags and cannon, curving and circling around there below the little town set on a hill, at a great rate, by way of commending her for following the lead of her sister States, and " going out."

The Judge's voice was not heard in a single huzza ; his hat remained immovable on his senatorial head, and no blue cockade adorned the lapel of his broad-cloth coat. The flag that was waving gayly out there at the steamer's masthead was a new flag to him. He

would have to learn how to love it. The cannon that was firing those noisy, harmless salutes would soon be belching death and destruction over the land he loved. The land he loved extended from Maine to Florida and stretched from ocean to ocean.

If he could have prevented this rashness, he would have done so, but his voice had not been asked in the councils that had impetuously legislated his State out of the Union. As he had not been able to raise it in warning, it should not now be heard in condemnation of the inevitable. They knew not what they had done, that excited, eager, rash few who had decided on this tremendous step! Now, indeed, there was but one course left for them all to pursue. He had never yet shrunk from a clearly defined duty; he would not now. He had been too shrewd an observer of the trend of events not to feel convinced that there was hot and hard work ahead for them all. Of course, the boys, his boys, would go. There'd be no keeping them at home. But a bitter and silent protest was in his heart against the folly of it all.

Of course the boys went, his boys, both of them. People said that the Judge's mute clinging to the disrupted Union must be over-looked, since he gave freely of his substance at every demand of the new Government and put no obstacles in the way of his two sons going off as cavalrymen. But he was quite aware that he was viewed with disfavor in his own town, and as hot blood and rapid resentment were the controlling elements in every discussion that came to the surface in those days, more

and more he withdrew to the seclusion of the sheltered home, too dignified to utter audible lament over the folly of his people, too keen-sighted to rejoice with them in the time of their uncalculating exultation.

Occupation by its enemies of the little town upon the hill was a mere question of time after the fall of New Orleans. People said (that was as soon as the Federalists got possession of the town) that they supposed "now Judge Strong would be happy," and they looked to see him "hobnob" with the General in command. His Union sentiments would stand him in good part now. It quite looked as if all the malicious prophecies of the people, who simply did not understand him *then*, were about to be fulfilled, when the General in command was seen driving to his headquarters in the Strong carriage, with the Strongs' splendid bays drawing it, and driven by the Strongs' driver. "Of course the Judge must have proffered it." They had yet to learn the nature of a military requisition.

The last feather was added when it was discovered that the Strong mansion was to be headquarters and the town was to be converted into a military post. The unjust disaffection of his neighbors would have melted into remorse quicker than it did if they could have been eye-witnesses to the Judge's reception of this news. It was in a curt note from the Adjutant-General stating that the Strong house offered the best position for head-quarters, and the Judge and his family would please consider themselves restricted to the second story from date of the succeeding day.

He looked across the breakfast-table, where they were all sitting when this order came to him, at the wife who had shared his good fortune and his bad fortune, and had been his wise and gentle privy-councilor for nearly forty years. Her hair was almost as white as his beard; her spirit quite as dauntless as his own. She was delicate and dainty, and had never known the rough side of life through all those prosperous years. He looked at the girls—such spirited, outspoken little rebels as they were! Should they be made prisoners of in their own flower-begirt home? It was easy enough to dispose of himself, but what of them? Endurance had reached its limit. He could go into the army. He would not count for much, but better there than biding under the same roof with the foe. The women must go up to one of the plantations.

Yes, he and his privy-councilor agreed it should be so. They would retire to the upper story just long enough to prepare themselves for the tiresome trip to the dreary plantations. They wished they had left even sooner, when they saw the cruel plows driving deep gashes through the shrubbery out there, and gazed down from their imprisonment, as they called it, on the army of miners and sappers who speedily converted their rose gardens and their myrtle avenues into hideous earthworks, felling their cherished shade-trees with a heartlessness that seemed monstrous to them, all unused as they were to the stern necessity that controls military movements. They could not take an impersonal view of any thing that plowed so deeply into their own souls.

Even the Judge ceased to reason and began to burn with a sense of vindictiveness. Perhaps, after all, the Union wherein such atrocities were possible was as well broken as preserved. Whether it was or not, because he had failed to preserve it intact was no reason why he should submit to be trampled upon like a worm. Thus slowly, but inevitably, the Judge was forced to the point where he must fire on the old flag that he had loved loyally and long. He would join the army as a private in an infantry company. "No fol-de-rol" for him. He hated the whole business. But he held a forced hand. (In his younger days the Judge had been known occasionally to take a hand at poker, just to kill time while running down to the city, and its phraseology came handily at times.) The quicker he placed the women in safety on the plantation in Arkansas, the quicker he would be in position to fight off the accumulating choler that threatened him with apoplexy.

He borrowed his own carriage and horses to convey him and his family to the river-bank, where they would take skiffs. It looked a trifle like a funeral procession as the women, veiled and weeping, filed solemnly down the steps and took their places in the waiting carriage. The Judge followed them in unsmiling dignity. They were going into exile. Their borrowed driver slammed the carriage door upon them and mounted to the box with a solemn "Git up" to his horses. Some one halted him from the interior of the house. The hurried step of a spurred boot sounded along the big central hall—and then, standing there with bared head before them, was the young officer upon whose unwilling hands

the odium of this ejection had been thrust. With a quick military salute to the veiled women, he turned his troubled eyes upon the Judge, sitting sternly erect upon the front seat. He held in one hand a bird's cage, in the other a basket of blooming hyacinths torn up by the roots. He knew they all hated him, and it was hard to say what he wanted just then to say to them. The hot blood mounted high up to the white temples that were in such sharp contrast to his sun-burned cheeks. He stammered out his errand presently, awkwardly enough: "I brought these, thinking the ladies might want to set them out somewhere else," indicating the hyacinths, "and this"—the bird cage—"supposing it had been forgotten."

"Present them to the General in command with my respects," said the Judge's wife in her most patriotic tones, "and tell him, if there is any thing more we can surrender for his comfort, we hope he will not be too modest to indicate it."

"Oh, mamma, that is cruel." A girl's veil was thrown back and a pair of little hands were held out for the hyacinths. "It was good of you to think of this. The bird would be in our way. It's mine. I give it to you. These I will take, thank you." Then they were gone, and he had nothing but a memory left, and a very inconvenient piece of army baggage on hand. But never was bird or beast better cared for than that useless little yellow warbler.

Rumors came back, after long months, that the Judge was actually in the army; that he was a foot-soldier, and that nothing angered him more fiercely than to have his officers in command remit any duty because

of his age or position. He would and must share alike with the humblest soldier in the ranks. He went about his camp duties more like an ascetic doing prescribed penance than a soldier delighting in the prospective fray. Marvelous stories were afloat concerning his powers of endurance—how, when his turn came to stand sentinel, neither heat nor cold nor wind nor rain deterred him from it ; how he, who had fared sumptuously and been clothed in fine raiment, ate his inadequate rations of hard-tack and rancid bacon with a degree of fortitude that made him an absolute inspiration to the rest of the camp, and how he, who had been obsequiously tended by fleet-footed slaves, now burnished his own bayonet and cooked his own rations with stoical indifference to the luxurious side of life.

It was only in the hours of relaxed camp discipline that a vestige of his former self reappeared. Then he withdrew into his shell. There was no principle involved in being hail-fellow-well-met with his comrades in arms, and it was only when under arms that he recognized any comradeship ; hence “Old Strong” was not popular. And then public sentiment veered once more. It is not in war times alone that public sentiment has a good deal in common with the weather cock. It had begun to veer slowly as soon as news had come of the Judge’s hardy fortitude in the ranks ; it went around with a swirl when the last and greatest indignity was put upon the beautiful home of the Strong’s by its being turned into an asylum for colored orphans. Any thing but that !

After all, the hideous fortifications that had plowed

up in a day the artistic work of years had been pointless, for the garrison had been removed, the little town being left to its fate under the surveillance of a provost-marshal and his corps. It was quite all the occasion demanded. And now the neighbors, looking over at the Strong house from their own unmolested premises, could see little darkies swarming over the already grass-grown fortifications, and the stuccoed steps grew dark with them of evenings, and the sound of their boisterous mirth was an offense to the air it floated upon. Truly more than seven devils had entered in and taken possession.

The news of it got to the Judge somehow, just on the eve of battle. He sat over his camp-fire moodily that night thinking with bitterness of soul over all that had overtaken him. His wife and his daughters—left to the tender mercies of freed slaves—himself denied even the poor solace of communication from a distance. His sons—dead or alive? Who knew. One in Virginia, the other in the trans-Mississippi department. His home—desecrated, defiled, wrecked. Himself—They say the Judge fought like a tiger the next day, but at its close he lay wounded, exhausted, spent. As a paroled and armless exempt, he found his way back to the plantation in Arkansas and to the soothing ministrations of wife and children.

People had got accustomed, if not reconciled, to the absence of the Strong's and the presence of the little darkey orphans in their old home by the time the war had been over a year, and there was yet no sign of their return. It was said Mrs. Strong had vowed she would never sleep under her desecrated roof



again ; when suddenly the old house underwent another transformation scene. The little darkies filed out and plasterers and painters and carpenters filed in. Such a sweeping and garnishing and purifying as it did undergo. Nothing but the outer walls seemed to remain undisturbed, and the white *debris* of plaster of Paris flew in clouds from every window in the house. Outside, there on the lawn, another army of men were leveling the earthworks and sodding the scarred yard over as fast as fast could be. People looked on in wonder. Could it be that the Judge had come out of it all with his pockets full of money? The evident signs of prosperity about the old Strong house were in imminent danger of making the neighbors forget that armless sleeve up on the plantation in Arkansas and all the Judge's service to his own side, when it transpired that the Strong house was confiscated property and could only be recovered by the Judge's taking the oath.

So then it was not the Judge's money that was doing all that work of renovation. Public curiosity rose to the pitch of torture. There was a "boss" workman there who knew all about it, of course, but he was terribly close-mouthed. Industrious research traced all this activity to a quiet gentleman who had settled in the town as a lawyer almost immediately after the cessation of hostilities, but no one could say authoritatively that it was he. He was very quiet and unobtrusive ; but when pressed with questions, said the climate of the South suited him much better than his own. He made no secret of the fact that he had first come to this little town as the

Adjutant-General to the General in command. He was kind and courteous, and immensely helpful in those darkly bewildering days that followed upon defeat. His little office in town was one of the brightest spots in it. Some even scoffed at the idea of a man who could keep two rose-bushes flourishing in tubs in the sunny strip of ground behind his office, and a canary bird swaying in a gilt cage, all for his own entertainment, having any thing in him to recommend him as a legal adviser. One of the roses was a red monthly and the other a sunset rose with golden and pink petals, and the lawyer cared for them both with tender impartiality.

Why should the Judge not take the oath? What trespass had he committed in his heart, when, driven into a corner, he had turned at bay and fought for the home that sheltered his offspring as any other animal would have done? What humiliation was involved in vowing allegiance to the old flag, his first, best love and last love, if not his only one? Why should he skulk through the remaining days of his life, because by the irrevocable arbitrament of arms he had been proven to have espoused the wrong side? Why should he shrink from renewing his vows to a government whose excellence he had never questioned?

These were the arguments he advanced very timidly within the sacred precincts of his own family circle, to the wife and the daughters who had gone into exile with him. The boys were still missing. One slept in a nameless grave near Shreveport; the other had carried his hotly-chafed spirit to the cooling atmosphere

of Honduras. The Union was preserved; but he hated it—*then*.

The Judge's determination to take the oath was not received favorably. It was a complete surrender. That is what a woman can never bring herself to—acknowledging openly that she is vanquished. She may be vanquished, and she may know that she is vanquished, and she may, furthermore, know that you know she knows it, but it is the putting it frankly into words that is gall and wormwood. That was why the Judge knew beforehand pretty much what to expect. He quailed before the indignant protests that were hurled at his defenseless head. It took a great deal to make Judge Strong quail, but it took still more to make him swerve from the course marked out by conscience.

He took the oath and was duly pardoned and reinstated in all his forfeited rights of citizenship, after which there was no let nor hindrance to their returning to the house in the hills, though, of course, Mrs. Strong declared plaintively it would "never be like home again."

The condition in which they found the premises was a matter of more amazement to the Strong's than it had been to their neighbors. There was not one sign left of the enemy's occupation but the grassy welts on the lawn and the free sweep of exposure to the public road, which at first was a sore trial to the nerves of the whole family. The Judge made it his business at once to begin sifting the mystery of this unfathered beneficence to him and his. A little bird gave him the right clew.

They had been settled in the old house but a few days when two enormous tubs, each containing a thrifty rose-bush, and a glittering gilt Chinese pagoda of a bird's cage, containing a useless little yellow warbler, were added to their effects. These were dumped abruptly down upon the portico with no message of any sort. A tag was fastened to each rose-bush, on which was written: "Survival of the fittest." The bird gave them the clew.

"Why did you do all this for me?" the Judge asked, sitting face to face with the new lawyer, whom he had unearthed as his benefactor.

"I don't know that I did do it for you," the ex-adjutant said, his eyes wandering from force of habit to where the bird's cage had swung, and the rose-trees had bloomed behind the little office.

"For whom then?"

"For your daughter—the one that lifted her veil and remembered to be kind and just to her enemy, even in the sharp hour of her own misery. God does not make such women as that every day, and some time, when the soreness has worn itself out of her heart and yours, I mean to ask her to be my wife. Not yet though. I bide my time."

It is safe to conclude that the soreness was worn out of every body's heart before the day when that strolling photographer sprung his camera on the old Strong house, when the family were all grouped on the stuccoed steps, for among the blurry forms on the steps is the ex-adjutant's. He is sitting quite close to the Judge's youngest daughter, and if you look at the picture through a magnifying-glass, you can see that

her fingers are clasped in his, though the petals of a handful of "sunset" roses almost hide them. The ex-adjutant's only regret connected with the picture is that he allowed the Judge to stay his renovating hand before all the windows were reglazed and all the missing balusters supplied.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### BLIND JO AND THE NEW PEOPLE.

THE "folks" on the Bendemma plantation could predict blind Jo's movements from day to day in the spring season with as much positiveness as the skilled astronomer brings to bear upon the movements of the celestial bodies. They called him "Ol Reg'lar."

There was nothing about blind Jo's personality to suggest this line of comparison. He was a terrestrial body of the most pronounced type, of the earth earthy, from the crown of the brimless straw wreck, which (retaining its position on the back of his head in obedience to some unexplained law of cohesion) was a mere sarcastic suggestion of a hat, down to the yawning toes of his huge "stoga" boots, which had trodden a solid pathway in the soft dirt of the road that led from his cabin down to the cool dark waters of the bayou where the "logger-head" and the snapping-turtles sunned themselves on the mossy logs, and the speckled sun-perch and the striped bass yielded up their happy lives for blind Jo's benefit.

No king on his throne was happier than blind Jo when the soft south winds began to blow, and the pecans hung out their pale green silk tassels, and the breath of the sweet-gum floated as incense to his nos-

trils. For with the springing of the grass and the bursting of the buds his own hour of emancipation drew on apace, and no enamoured lover of Nature ever awaited her vernal awakening with more eagerness than did blind Jo, whose eyelids were closed forever to all her witchery of form and color.

During the winter Jo hibernated in a corner of the fireplace in Melindy's cabin, where his daily dole of pork and corn bread was grudgingly dispensed by Melindy's reluctant hand, and he was made to remember that he was but a cumberer of the earth. When blind Jo emerged from the gloom of Melindy's cabin to the brightness and the lightness of the outside world, the folks knew that the fish were biting and that for some months to come Jo would be an independent merchant, trading in the fruits of his own industry for the luxuries of tobacco and whisky, that were not included in Melindy's daily dole. This prospective independence makes Jo straighten himself up somewhat proudly, as he passes from under the low-browed cabin door and turns his eager steps toward the bayou where the tangled vines of the fox-grapes and the muscadines festoon the banks.

Jo had a satellite—a small, meager, ebony-hued attendant, whose shabbiness was an intensified reproduction of Jo's own. It was Isham, the youngest of Melindy's "ten." Circumstances had conspired to limit Isham's choice of a career in life. But he bore circumstances no grudge. He too hibernated in the winter, with occasional interruptions for the purpose of replenishing the wood fire or drawing a bucket of water out of the barrels that stood under the guttered

caves. He too rejoiced in the coming of the spring, for then he spent the long deliciously thriftless days down on the bayou's bank, baiting blind Jo's hooks, and squatting immovably at his heels to watch for the tremulous moment when the painted cork on blind Jo's line should bob vivaciously enough to warrant a view-halloo. Then Isham's excited "Dar he, gr'daddy; cotch 'm!" would make the welkin ring, and blind Jo, obedient to the shout, would send his long line whizzing through the air, perhaps with a glittering "catch" reflecting the sun's rays on iridescent scales, perhaps with a ragged remnant of water-bleached red-worm only.

It would take but a fraction of a second to decide whether Isham should be made a participator in his chief's triumph, or the recipient of a swift back-handed "cuff" in punishment for his misdirected zeal. Practice did not make perfect in Isham's case, and his judgment on the subject of bites is still open to the charge of fallibility.

In the early stages of his existence as a supplement to his grandfather, Isham, in the exuberance of youthful spirits, was much given to raising false hopes in the blind fisher's breast, but the pains and penalties of this innocent pastime proving largely in excess of the amount of fun extracted therefrom, he learned how to sit like a hideous little pop-eyed heathen idol, in wooden immobility, with his gaze glued to the spot of color on the dark bosom of the bayou that told where Jo's hook had gone down until the moment for legitimate action arrived. Sometimes Nature would assert herself, and Isham's ebony lids



would close tightly over the strained black and white ivory balls that had so little speculation in them, but his slumber was noiseless and blind Jo's patience infinite.

It was easy to be patient out there, under the broad skies that gave him such a sense of roominess ; with the muscadine vines swaying gently over his head under the weight of a tuneful mocking-bird ; with the drowsy tones of the cicadas punctuating the stillness ; with an occasional splash of a startled turtle dropping from its mossy perch into the ruffled waters ; with the chatter of the blackbirds floating to him from the freshly-plowed fields just across the bayou there ; with the lazy call of the distant plowman to his lazier team, carrying him back for a fleet while to the time when he, too, had his hand upon the plow—all going to make up such a pleasantly peaceful contrast to Melindy's sharp tirades, to the yelping curs and the fretting children back there in the cabin he had escaped from.

Sitting there in the bow of a stranded skiff whose hull still reflects red and green patches of faded splendor in the waters that lap its sunken sides, with the gray beards of the Spanish moss drooping about his massive shoulders from the low-growing branches of the water oaks that line the bayou, his bright bandanna handkerchief knotted loosely about his columnar bronze throat, and his patient hands clasped about the long cane pole he had groped for through the brake ; blind Jo attracted the attention of one of the new people of the big house who called himself an artist, and from the isolation of the fishing days, when Isham and the mocking-birds peopled all his world,

he was suddenly exalted to the position of a model and a local hero.

He was not fond of the new people. It would have been incompatible with his loyalty to his own "w'ite folks" to have cultivated a fondness for them. He was nobody but old blind Jo to the new folks. He had been a personage of importance in the days when "Ol' Mars'" and "Ol' Miss" had reigned royally at the big house. Perhaps change of allegiance would have been less difficult if he hadn't known just how the place had passed into the new people's possession. He was glad the ol' folks had been laid away under the jessamine bushes in the garden before "Mars' Ben" had gotten things into such a snarl that the place had passed into the hands of the commission merchants. Yes, the new people were New Orleans folks, and Bendemma, with all its chattels, including blind Jo himself, belonged to the new people.

He didn't care much for Mars' Ben's downfall—he'd brought it all on himself. But Miss Jinny! Miss Jinny's fate sat heavily on blind Jo's heart. He didn't even know where the child was. The folks in the quarters told him she was teaching school at the Colonel's. It made blind Jo hate the new people worse than ever to think they could eject Miss Jinny from the house she was born in, and set her to teaching school for a living.

He never went up to the big house now. He used to go every night. If it was winter time, he would "tote" the cut fire-wood from the wood-pile to the back gallery and pile it up where it would be handy for the house-folks next day before taking his

stand, hat in hand, in the doorway of Ol' Miss's bedroom for a few moments of social intercourse. He was the "driver" in those days and acted as a sort of subaltern to the overseer. If it was summer, it was his privilege to sit humbly on the lowest step of the front gallery and imbibe family matters or local items from the group clustered above him on the cool, dark veranda. No one was afraid to talk before Jo.' He was of them as well as with them. Their troubles were his troubles, their comforts his.

"W'ite folks sot a heap a sto' by ol' Jo in dem days." That was blind Jo's proudest boast, and when the fish were biting well, and his good-humor must needs find vocal vent, he generally effervesced in a reminiscent vein, and tried to hand the memory of those happy days down to his grandson as a proud legacy.

It was chance that first brought blind Jo and the new people into contact. He was of too little worth in those days to be enrolled among the workers, so he was easily lost sight of. He might have been transferred to the realms of art without even time for a protest had not Isham suddenly awakened from one of his stolen cat-naps to find a camera pointed directly at blind Jo from the other side of the bayou, and given a yell of warning so full of terror that blind Jo rashly concluded a "painter" was upon them, and tumbled incontinently into the water, preferring death by drowning to the slower process of mastication by a panther.

Isham fled, ignominiously leaving the blind fisherman to his fate. Jo's fate was to flounder about in the bayou, like a bewildered hippopotamus, until

fished out by the strong right arm of the amateur photographer, who placed him effectively, and, while he was drying, pointed the camera at him again with better success.

It struck blind Jo as an immense piece of frivolity that one of the new people should be strolling through the woods making pictures. When "Ol' Mars' took t' trampin' " it had been to select the proper timber for the saw-mill or for fence rails. "W'ite folks didn't walk for nuthin' " in the olden times that represented Jo's Paradise Lost. But he liked the new man's voice, and he liked the strong grip of his muscular young hands in his shirt collar, and he liked, best of all, the hearty invitation given him by the photographer to "come up to the big house that night and get a toddy to drive the wetting from his bones." It sounded like old times to be ordered up to the big house on so sociable an errand, and it felt like old times when he dropped his ragged straw hat on the ground by the front steps and seated himself in the old place to sip his toddy luxuriously. It warmed the very cockles of his heart to be there again.

Those were new faces, up there on the old gallery above him. What mattered that to blind Jo? Those were strange voices—that did matter. He missed the masterful tones of Ol' Mars', and the music of Miss Jinny's voice was silent. (Ol' Mars' was at rest under the jessamines in the garden, but how about Miss Jinny?) They were talking about the old plantation up there above him. There was comfort in that for Jo. They had not quite got the hang of the "gin-slough field," and the "Burnt Ridge," and "Hard-

scrabble Corner" yet, but those local designations would come in time. These were city folks, and blind Jo felt his own superiority to them intensely. He could tell them, if they would only ask him, that it was a big mistake to put the oats over in Hardscrabble Corner, and to plow up the long field, where the coco pest held sway, but they didn't ask him. "Ol' Mars'" would have done it. "Ol' Mars' sot a heap er sto' by his 'pinion."

He soon found out that there was perplexity and confusion among the new people—confusion about boundary lines, and perplexity about title-deeds. There was discussion about lawyers, who must be called in to make something clearer, or else the big house and the yard premises would "revert." There was confused allusion to some "stakes," which nobody had ever seen and nobody could find.

If they had not been new people they would have known that the motionless creature sitting there with his gray head bent slightly forward, listlessly inert, excepting when he lifted the glass of toddy to his lips, was drinking in every word. Some of them were words that conveyed no meaning to him. "Revert"—what did that mean? "Stakes?" Yes; he knew what that meant, nobody knew better. Nobody but himself knew at all.

A window seemed to have been opened in his memory, sending in a flood of light. But that light must not shine on the new people. It must illumine Miss Jinny's path alone. He had nothing to give the new people but humble thanks for the toddy, as he stood up to place the empty glass on the gallery floor,

and, picking up his ragged straw hat, he groped his way back over the familiar path from the big house to Melindy's cabin.

After that tumble into the water, Jo's conduct became so very eccentric that the belief that he had lost his head permanently when losing his balance temporarily rapidly gained currency. He discarded his satellite as a primary movement in the new direction, and availing himself of the team that was going to town for freight one day, he presented himself in person before the first lawyer in Slaterville. He had a story to tell—a story which involved issues of such tremendous moment to Miss Jinny that nothing short of the lawyer's solemn oath that they were absolutely alone in the office unsealed his lips.

Then he told how, sitting one evening on the steps of the big house long ago, with only "Ol' Mars'" and "Ol' Miss" above him, he had heard them talking sorrowfully of Mars' Ben's "skittish ways"; of how they "mourned" at the thought of the old house ever passing out of the family; of how "Ol' Miss" had asked if there wasn't some way of "slicing" the yard and the house off from the plantation and putting it in "Miss Jinny's" name; of how he (not *blind* Jo then) had gone with "Ol' Mars'" the very next day and driven some stakes in the woods "close back" of the garden; of how he didn't like to say positive, but he sorter felt like there was some writing about it in the flap of Ol' Miss's little work-table that Miss Jinny had "took" away with her; of how he didn't want nothing said about it unless he could find them stakes, for if Mars' Ben had "give up"

the whole place, maybe it wouldn't be nothing but "pester" for Miss Jinny to stir the matter up; of how this having all happened so very long ago, when Miss Jinny wasn't any thing but a little "skeery critter" that he had to hold in the saddle when he was teaching her how to ride, he might not be able to find the stakes, but he was going to try for it.

The folks wondered why blind Jo had developed such a sudden indifference to the bayou and his fishing poles. Such conscience as Isham was possessed of smote him sorely for this change in the old man's habits. He haunted the woods now alone, always alone. If he suspected that he was watched, the most savage denunciations fell with withering effect upon his watchers. Whole days he would spend in the woods, groping, walking slowly, feeling his way through them foot by foot, almost inch by inch, coming back to the cabin at night, spent with exhaustion, and ready to eat eagerly of the crumbs that fell from Melindy's table with the dogs.

He brooked no questions and volunteered no information. The folks grew tired of speculating about him. The new people at the big house forgot all about him. Only the lawyer in Slaterville, holding himself ready for "a case" if those mythical stakes should ever be located, speculated idly once in a while about the strange old darkey on the Bendemma plantation, who might have told him a truth, or might have made the story out of whole cloth.

But there came a night when blind Jo did not come back to eat of the crumbs which fell from Melindy's table—such a wild, tempestuous night, when the wind

and the lightning and the thunder and the hail conspired to send terror into the simple hearts of all "the folks." They wondered uneasily where old Jo had stopped. Of course at the "nearest cabin." But the "nearest cabin" knew him not.

Out there, in the dense woods that had grown with Miss Jinny's growth and strengthened with her strength, until the feeble sapling had become the mighty oak, they found him the next day, with the sparkling sunshine resting placidly on his wet upturned face, and the birds singing heartlessly to his closed ears. Across his broad chest lay a huge limb rent from a tempest-torn tree. It had stilled the beating of his loyal heart as surely as a bullet. His long right arm was twined about a stake driven firmly into the ground and capped with iron. The sinewy fingers of the old man had closed about this iron cap in a death-grip. He had triumphed with his last breath. And Miss Jinny was the gainer.

The lawyer in Slaterville had his case. The new people had their defeat. Miss Jinny has her home, and blind Jo has his grave beside Ol' Mars' and Ol' Miss under the jessamine bushes in the garden of the big house.

THE END.









